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THE THREE TWINS

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The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic

Brenda E. F. Beck

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS / BLOOMINGTON

305785

This book has been published with the help of a
grant from the Social Science Federation of Canada,
using funds provided by the Social Sciences and
Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Beck, Brenda E. F.
The three twins.

Bibliography: p.
1. Epic poetry, Tamil—History and criticism.
2. Oral tradition—India—Tamil Nadu. I. Title.
PL4758.2.B4 894'.811103 80–8841
ISBN 0-253-36014-5 AACR2
1 2 3 4 5 86 85 84 83 82

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Acknowledgments

Assistance with the preparation of this study has come from many sources. The National Science Foundation funded an original field trip to India during 1964–66. Several versions of the story studied here were collected at that time. In 1972 the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute facilitated a return visit to India during which further material was obtained. Later, in 1976 and 1977, a Small Grant from the University of British Columbia helped pay for several tasks connected with the early stages of analysis. Canada Council grant #S76-0185 enabled completion of the later stages of this inquiry. The help of all these funding agencies is gratefully acknowledged.

A large number of individuals also deserve thanks for their contributions. E. C. Rāmacāmi sang, and later dictated, several versions of the epic that later formed the starting point for this work. P. Palanicāmi added color and verve to these local performances. In addition, K. Cuntaram has made a major contribution to the present study. He patiently collected answers to endless probing questions and also served as a scribe for one lengthy text. Vijayameenakshi Srinivasan and Nirmala Chari polished the author's initial English translation of that dictated account, while Vaija Ragunathan and Nirmala Chari undertook to type the Tamil original. Vellakovil M. Krishnamurthi and Kangayam Visvanathan contributed several sketches later used to illustrate the story.

Many others have had some hand in the work of analysis. Vaija Ragunathan helped to study six variant versions, while Kamala Paul assisted with a seventh and Ishak Lebbe read through an eighth. Mandakranta Bose contributed by finding comparative materials in the *Mahābhārata*. C. Periyacāmi provided some sample drum rhythms, and Wendy Stuart supplied an ethnomusicological perspective. A. Sundaram, of Vancouver, helped with a translation of the epic's poetic lament. Joan Prentice assisted with every stage of the typing and in copying diagrams. Vicky Jensen handled the technical preparation of photographs.

All the above people have shared in the creation of this work. All of them deserve thanks. It is hoped that each will also enjoy a measure of satisfaction in the completed results.

Transliteration Conventions

Tamil words and names have been transliterated according to the system employed by the Madras University *Tamil Lexicon.* One minor simplification has been adopted: that is, "n" and "*n*" are not distinguished. Each retroflex "ṇ," however, is marked. A familiar English spelling (Madurai, Krishna) or a Sanskrit one (Gandhārī) has been used, where established convention so dictates. This has been done to avoid confusion, since written Tamil (transliterated) often serves to disguise common words. In a few further cases (Murugan, Kongu) a "g" has been used instead of "ṅ." In bibliographic citations, however, the "ṅ" is preserved. A single spelling of Vēḷāḷar has been used throughout in an attempt to avoid confusion.

Introduction

During the 1960s I spent nearly two years in the Coimbatore District of Tamilnadu. As a social anthropologist, I was initially interested in studying Tamilian social organization. I elected to focus on rural traditions, and so I chose to live in an unelectrified house in a small village about fifty miles from a major city. The nights were long, and I wondered how the people occupied themselves after dark. It quickly became clear that these evening hours constituted the most interesting part of the day. Soon after dusk the sounds of a hand drum would waft across the settlement. A bard, an exorcist, or some other folk performer would be about to provide an evening of entertainment.

One of the most popular events in this nighttime performance tradition was the telling of a local epic. The settlement in which I had chosen to stay was particularly fortunate. Two men in the village knew this great legend in detail. But better still were occasions when the uncle of one of these local singers came for extended visits. Sometimes he would agree to tell the whole story, a project that took between 15 and 20 evenings to complete.

Realizing that this was an important legend, and having a tape recorder with ample tape, I soon decided to record the entire account. After I had the full story, however, an unforeseen problem arose. How could I study the text? The bard's account was complex and very long. I could not listen to it over and over because my recorder had to run on batteries; and there was no way I could

transcribe 44 hours of tape. Soon a different solution was found. For a small sum, I persuaded the same singer to sit down and recite his story to a scribe.[1] In 1975, ten years later, I finally translated that account. When I compared this document with my performance tapes, many interesting differences emerged, despite the fact that I had asked the singer to recite his lines exactly as he would normally have performed them. Later I obtained a second pair of story variants from a local shrine. One was a temple manuscript, the other a tape recording. In the latter, the bard had recited a magical section of the legend used in local rituals. Eventually four more versions of the story were obtained in various printed formats. The present study, therefore, has been based on eight variants.

The telling, reenactment and interpretation of epic stories has been important in India for more than 2,000 years. The two great epic accounts that stem from South Asian cultural sources are the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which are still of great importance in popular thought. Retellings have captured the minds and hearts of millions, and multiple-language variants of these ancient legends are now critical ingredients of many regional identities. Sanskrit versions, similarly, lie at the heart of both Indian nationalism and much Indian historical imagination.

Parallel to these great stories there also exist many local legends, which sometimes grow until they acquire the status of epic accounts. Cherished by specific local populations and identified with local assertions of geographic and cultural uniqueness, many of these extended narratives have only recently been noticed by scholars. Their role in the regional context now appears to be as important in creating loyalties there as the great epics are in molding popular concepts about Indian culture as a whole. What are the similarities and differences between India's pan-continental epic traditions and local ones? Equally important, what role does such an account play in the creation of a regional identity?

THE GROWTH OF AN EPIC

Though now clearly an epic, the story studied here was probably once only a short ballad. Current knowledge of Tamil balladry, the geographic location of story events, and the structure of the story itself all seem to suggest that conclusion. The expansion of any story involves finding new patterns and ideas to enhance or enliven a few

basic events. By borrowing from known traditions, a short account can gradually acquire interesting new overtones. Generally such additions set up parallels, contrasts, and transformations with reference to general audience expectations. An heroic tale begins to develop out of a simple story when a longer description of actual events is employed to highlight the valor of individual characters. Several heroic tales, when grounded in the same historical setting, later may become merged as a legend. Such an account will depict the larger span of a hero's life. A legend, furthermore, can acquire ritual appeal. A hero's grave site may develop into a major shrine, for example, or his castle may become a place of tourist pilgrimage.

True epics emerge only when such expanded legends get woven into still wider cloth. That happens when a hero's tale takes on an organizing role in a whole tapestry of story. To become an epic, a legend must become embroidered with a wide array of cultural and mythological motifs. In such a process of transformation the original heroic tale need not lose its links with key historical events. Instead, most epics seem to represent a successful merger of widely varied materials. Indeed, the appeal of an epic lies mainly in providing a skillful blend of historic realism with the poetic refinement of several tellers' active imaginations.

There is no distinct term in Tamil for either the ballad or the epic genre. In general they are merged under two general headings: *katai pāṭu* (story song) and *pāṭu katai* (song story). The limited literature in English that describes these Tamil materials translates the two phrases with the single term "ballad." Actually, most Tamil folk stories or legends are musical compositions longer than the average English ballad. The English form of musical story averages about 100 lines, or 25 rhymed quatrains, while the short Tamil examples run to about 2,000 lines. The longest Tamil examples of such sung stories are 11,000 lines long.

The rhythmical format of Tamil sung stories is more varied than that of their English counterparts, a contrast that is in keeping with their greater length. Meters and tunes shift with each scene in the Tamil examples. In this way, contrasting patterns are employed as one of many devices to hold the attention of a village audience. Though some ballads in the Tamil corpus have meter and rhythm throughout the text, many others are performed using prose and poetry in alternation. In such cases, prose sections are spoken dramatically, punctuated only by a few drum beats or other musical

CHART 1. Eight Versions of the Brothers Story

In the text the various versions studied are sometimes referred to by letter. An attempt was made to select letters with some meaning and to indicate by the alphabetic order the relative literary sophistication of each text. B = Bardic story; D = Dictated story; F = Festival performance; H = Handwritten palm leaves; I = Itinerant paperback; J = Radio play digest; K = Kantiamman manuscript; L = Library volume.

Key	Title	Author	Locale and date	Portion and length
B	*Aṇṇanmār Katai* or *Ponnarum Caṅkarum Katai* or *Kunnuṭaiyā Kavuṇṭar Katai*	E. C. Rāmacāmi of Erucanampāḷaiyam, assisted by P. Paḷanicāmi, his brother's son. Audience consisted of a wide range of non-Brahman castes, adults and children, ranging from 20 to 40 people.	Recorded on 19 different nights between 6/23/65 and 9/1/65 in a village house in Ōlappāḷaiyam, via Kangayam, Coimbatore District.	Complete tape recording, lasting 44 hours. Five segments, totaling 197 pages, have been transcribed.
D	Same as B.	E. C. Rāmacāmi and P. Paḷanicāmi.	Taken down by K. S. Cuntaram (scribe) between 6/25/65 and 9/3/65 in relative privacy in a house in Ōlappāḷaiyam village.	Complete; 622 pages foolscap in manuscript, or roughly 11,500 typed lines.
F	*Aṇṇanmār Pāṭal*	Taiyampāḷaiyam. Audience of about 100 people attending festival celebrations.	2/18/66	Lament only; 13-page transcription, or about a 20-minute performance.

H	*Irattinamūrtti Kaṭṭaḷai Kalitturai*	Unknown	Taiyampāḷaiyam, Cēṭṭiar Cāmi Temple, 1930.	Lament only; 27-page manuscript, or 150 quatrains.
I	*Ponnaḷaka Rennum Kaḷḷarakar Ammānai*	Anonymous. Attributed (in conversation with the publisher) to Pukalenti, a 13th- to 14th-century Tamil court poet and author of *Nalvenpa*. (This claim is probably not true.)	Madras: R. G. Pati Co., 1965 and 1967 editions used, but original edition probably much earlier (1820?) Pārttacārati Nāyuṭu Sons, Madras, published nearly identical version in 1965. Other, undated editions published 1940s or 1950s.	Complete; 144-page paperback, or about 4,700 lines.
J	*Kunrutaiyān Kataiyum Pāṭalum*	P. Kaṇṇanār. Introduction to a radio play.	Calankaṇṭapuram: Tenral Nūrpatippu Kaḻakam, 1968; but broadcast in 1966.	Very brief outline of the action sequence only.
K	*Sri Periyakkāṇṭiamman Ponnar Caṅkar Pāratam*	Copied from palm leaves at Vīramalai temple, V. C. Taṅkamuttucuvāmikal, copy editor and publisher.	1971. No publication details available.	Complete; 130-page paperback, or about 4,500 lines.
L	*Aṇṇanmār Cuvāmi Katai*	Kaviñar Caktikkanal (nom de plume for K. P. Paḻanicāmi); said to be taken from palm leaves used for K.	Coimbatore: Verrivēl Patippakam, 1971; reprinted 1977 with added introductory essays.	Complete; 298-page paperback, or about 9,500 lines.

The British Museum catalogue cites one other version, in the form of a drama: Tyaga Raja Pillai, *Ponnara and Caṅkarar Natakam* (Trichy, 1902), 134 pp. The book was so deteriorated that it was impossible to reproduce the text on microfilm. In October 1977 it was sent for deacidification and lamination, a process that takes many months. It is not certain whether book can be saved at all. The following works on the cultural history of the Kongu area contain short summaries of the Brothers story: Caktitēvi, 1974; Cinnacāmi, 1963; Paḻanicāmi, 1948; and Tiruvanan, 1960.

tones. The wording of the spoken portions of a text is not fixed. Instead, the general scene is redescribed at each telling, and the songs elaborate on particular heroic actions or key events. Unlike the prose segments, these musical interludes often have a semiritualistic or sacred tone.

In both Tamil and English ballads different versions can vary greatly in length. Each version can even contain unique scenes and action sequences. One popular paperback version of the Brothers story, for example, has about 4,700 lines of text. A more literary variant, published more recently, contains over 9,500. The version dictated by the bard I commissioned has about 11,500 lines. These differences in length provides many possibilities for internal variation.

Ballad singing used to be extremely popular in England and Scotland. Many of the texts are now known only to collectors and must be studied in university libraries. In Tamilnadu, by contrast, professional ballad singers still roam the countryside. Here one can meet numerous skilled singers of song stories, especially in remote village areas. In North America older forms of the ballad have now been largely replaced by "Country and Western" music. Developed by professional singers, these newly commercialized musical pieces do retain some continuity with earlier song styles, but the marketing methods, composition habits, and turnover patterns have changed. Whereas immediate feedback used to be available from an audience of folk listeners, criticism of such compositions is now supplied by a team of professionals, or by reference to the volume of record sales and radio call-in requests. Similar kinds of production and marketing shifts may also affect Tamil ballad writing in the decades just ahead.

The closest parallel to the Brothers story in English balladry is probably the *Gest of Robyn Hode.* Although it is vastly different in length and in the details of its composition, some similarities are worth considering. The *Gest* has been called England's popular folk epic. According to F. J. Child, one of England's greatest folksong scholars, this work was also composed around a set of earlier ballads.[2] Furthermore, Robin Hood (contemporary spelling) was a devotee of the Virgin Mary, much as the twin brothers in the Tamil epic are the servants of their own local goddess. Both sets of heroes are basically peasants and devout men. Each carries himself with a special dignity. Despite lowly backgrounds, these protagonists know how to move with the mighty. Both are adventurers at heart. In addition, each

account contains action sequences in which the heroes are challenged by wily outsiders. Robin Hood has a series of encounters, first with a knight, next with a sheriff, and finally with a king. In the Brothers story the equivalent challengers are a group of artisans, a tribe of hunters, and a king. Both accounts draw on a general stock of cultural traditions and describe a generally feudal political order. Each hero is extremely respectful of women, yet shies away from personal romance in favor of an independent, warrior life style.[3]

Between 150 and 200 ballads are extant in Tamilnadu today.[4] Of these perhaps seven or eight have epic-like characteristics, in that they may describe genuine historic events. Many of them also contain some description of India's broader social fabric. I know of no other Tamil ballad, however, that rivals the Brothers story in overall epic character. Its social and philosophical underpinnings are more fully discussed later. Suffice it to say here that this story stands out from a much wider corpus of materials by virtue of its generational depth, its focus on a series of military campaigns, its incorporation of a wide variety of social and geographic background materials, and its concern with traditional heroic themes. In all these respects the Brothers story presently lies closer to folk epics known from elsewhere in India than to parallel song stories reported from within the Tamil language area.

Several early versions of the *Gest* stem from the sixteenth century, about the same time the Brothers story is likely to have been composed. The initial ballads on which the *Gest* was built were reworked and recombined over time so that their original form is no longer clearly discernible. The South Indian epic to be studied here stems from the same kind of indeterminate past. What is known of the social milieu in which its early composers worked can be summarized in a few paragraphs.

THE HISTORICAL MILIEU

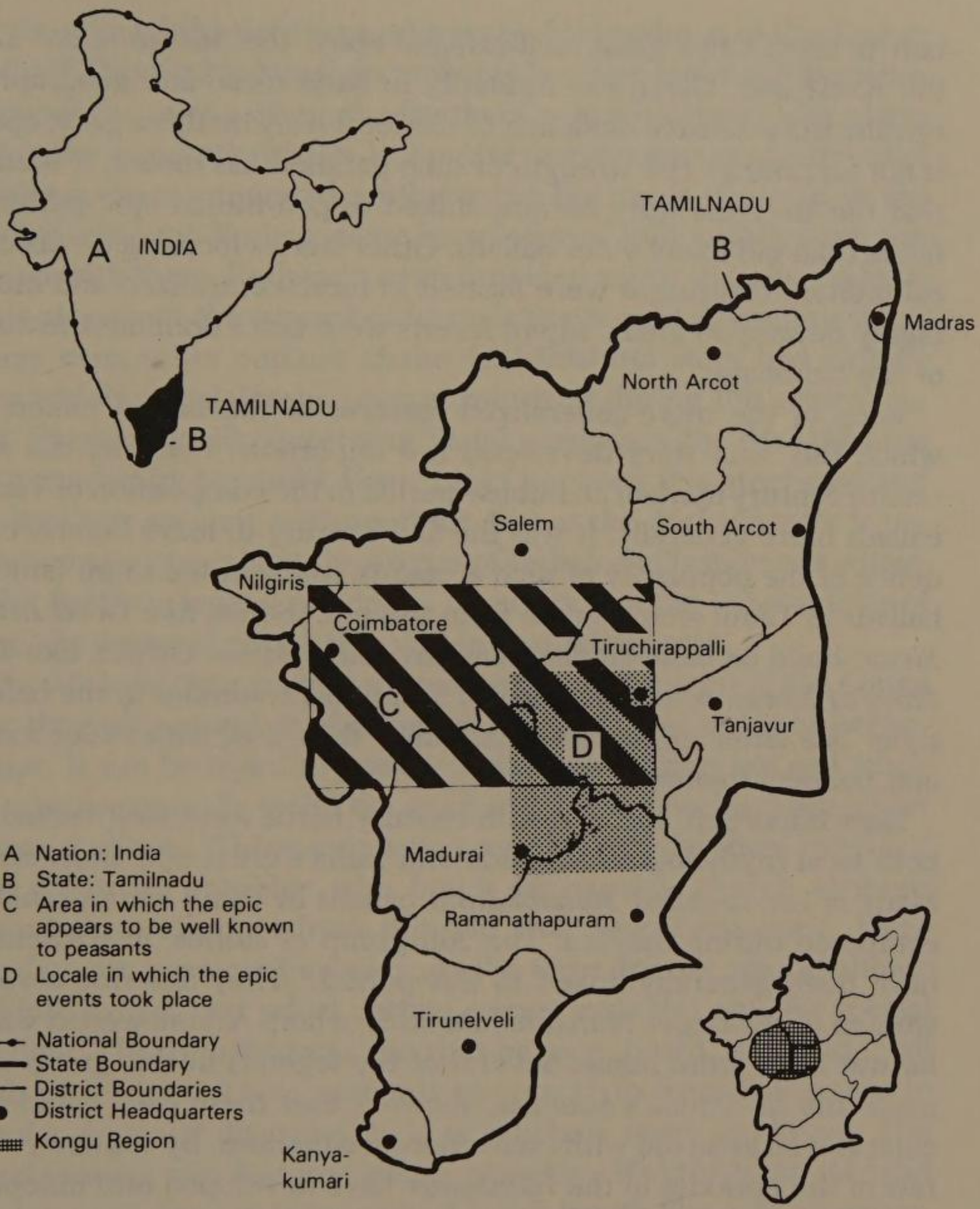
What historical and social circumstances might have caused this particular Tamil legend to develop differently than other ballads sung in the same milieu? The differences can be accounted for in three ways. First, this particular story builds upon relatively early social events, in particular on a specific military battle that probably took place in the second half of the fifteenth century. The dating of

this "core" event allows the calculation that local bards have had about five centuries in which to develop present-day accounts. Notably, the "newest" oral versions of this legend are the most epic-like in character. All other Tamil ballads that describe military events concern battles fought in the seventeenth century or later. Local bards have, therefore, been working over these other war campaign stories for a shorter period. If a modern era, with the competition of the radio and television had not intervened, some of these other military accounts might also have developed a marked epic character.

A second reason why the Brothers story has developed so fully has to do with the social composition of the region in which its "core" military events occurred. Various pieces of evidence from within the story suggest a strong association with a kind of political no-man's-land. These events occur precisely on the boundary between three major South Indian political realms: the Chola, Cera, and Pandya kingdoms. Despite repeated expansions and contractions, these three political territories enjoyed relatively stable identities for many centuries. Though bitter rivalries have always existed among them, the area in which the Brothers story takes place was never important to any of their struggles. Instead, the epic locale consists of a dry upland domain that was of little interest to any of the major ruling houses. Even today, this location has no firm identity of its own. Indeed, it lies just on the periphery of Tamilnadu's main upland bowl (called Kongu), through which the great Kāveri River flows. At best the heroes' own locale has weak links to one strip along the southern bank of that river system. Its main associations, however, lie with a set of forbidding rocky hills (The Vīramalai), which stand out starkly against the local skyline.

Other scholars have already observed that both ballads and epics, as genre forms, have tended to develop mainly among politically marginal peoples. Such is clearly the case with the English ballad, for example, which flourished most fully in the English and Scottish borderland area. Additional folk epics reported from India also exhibit this feature.[5] Ballads are also said to flourish during periods of political upheaval. The fifteenth century was such an era in much of South India. It was a time of warring kingdoms, of extensive refugee movement, and of religious and sectarian rivalries.

The third reason why the Brothers story stands out from a larger corpus of song stories in Tamil, however, is due to the specific social



MAP. 1. Location of the Brothers Story

(as opposed to political) characteristics of the area in question. The presence of a set of remote forested hills is important in this regard. In earlier centuries such underdeveloped areas were linked to a hunting and gathering life-style, and, indeed, some still have this character. Such hills were viewed as culturally and socially marginal to the world of civilized men. In building on a theme of rivalry between mainstream agriculturalists and the inhabitants of a hilly, forested area, the Brothers story develops a theme that is also impor-

tant to India's two great civilizational epics: the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa.* Given the similarity in basic social and geographic terrain, the extensive modeling of this local story on those great epics is not surprising. The strength of such parallels has meant, it seems, that the Brothers story became linked to pan-Indian epic patterns faster than did many other ballads. Other stories focusing on historical military campaigns were located in more-centralized and more highly developed areas, where forests were not a dominant feature of the landscape.

Some of the more-generalized features of the bardic milieu in which this song story developed are important. For one, the sixteenth century marked an intense period in the composition of Tamil ballads more generally. It was the first century to leave behind evidence of the popularity of such accounts. Many of the more famous ballads in Tamil seem to date from this era.[6] Some, like *Good Little Sister,* build on basic familial tensions and loyalties. Others, like *The Story of Kovalan,* rework ancient Tamil folk traditions in the ballad style. The latter mixes romance, rather than war, with wider social and political themes.

Most important, the sixteenth-century bards were well versed in both local mythological tradition and India's great epic literature.[7] Many of the so-called *Mahābhārata* ballads in Tamil were probably composed during this era. The Alli group of stories, in particular, have been generally linked to this period.[8] They describe several women in the larger *Mahābhārata* story whom Arjuna wooed while he was away from home. Several of the legends in this group also make fun of Arjuna's enemies, showing that these men could not cope as well as he did with such amorous situations. By contrast, very few of the episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* have developed into independent Tamil ballad stories.[9] This striking difference in local popularity perhaps explains why the *Mahābhārata* has had a greater influence on the Brothers story than has the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

The most-famous version of the *Mahābhārata* in Tamil is the *Pāratam* of Villiputtūr Alvar, written in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. By this time at least five earlier versions of the *Mahābhārata* had already circulated within Tamilnadu. With the appearance of Villiputtūr's version, the story's influence spread still more widely through the popular culture of the day. Villiputtūr's account was apparently written at Vakkapakai, a place where the

author enjoyed the patronage of a powerful headman of the Kinkar family.[10] This Kinkar kingdom probably lay close to the northeastern fringes of the region where the Brothers' own adventures took place. Only a few generations after Villiputtūr, several groups of influential warrior-farmers emigrated southward to the locale depicted in the Brothers account. Perhaps some knowledge of Villiputtūr's work was carried with them. Perhaps it even provided a new stimulus for local bards already in the process of formulating a good adventure story. In any case, other outlines of the *Mahābhārata* story had already been widely circulated by peasant minstrels during this critical period. Further details concerning Tamil versions of the *Mahābhārata* are provided in Appendix Four. Links between this great epic and the Brothers account are important. Just as the *Mahābhārata* is understood as a story about the origins of Indian civilization as a whole, so the Brothers legend provides a description of the social origins of a specific regional population within that wider area.

The *Mahābhārata* is know to contemporary residents of the Kongu area through a number of different mediums and styles of performance. It can be heard in great temples from local poets and scholars, who occasionally recite the work and discuss specific passages for a large audience. These instruction sessions parallel those provided by a Christian minister who builds his weekly church sermons around short excerpts from the Old and New Testaments. More popular with peasants, however, are the stage dramas, puppet shows, and folk dances that select certain scenes from this epic for special retelling. The *Mahābhārata* can thus be seen, heard, and read in all kinds of formats. These accounts vary in style from folk songs, to popular dramatic dialogues, to very scholarly verse renditions. The Tamil cinema also features stories from the *Mahābhārata.* At least two segments have so far appeared as full-length film extravaganzas. Finally, local temple festivals sometimes involve a yearly retelling of this great epic story. One such event happens regularly, during eighteen days in March–April. The site is a temple dedicated to Draupadī near Pollachi, not far from Coimbatore, the central city of this area.

The Brothers story not only helps to link a local region to national epic traditions but also serves to highlight the special pride that local residents feel in various aspects of their regional culture. It expresses a local spirit that purposefully challenges some of India's wider cul-

tural norms. A popular ambivalence toward the orthodox, Brahman style of life thrives in this regional milieu, and through this folk epic it challenges some of the assumptions that such all-India legends perpetuate. The local story contains an informative, nested blend of residents' many-stranded ambivalent cultural loyalties.

India's great epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa,* have been known to outsiders for some time, but the great regional epics of India remain largely unexplored. Such materials have been little studied, even by those living on the subcontinent, and are virtually unknown elsewhere. A range of contrasts exists between oral and written variants of popular epics. India's modern and rapidly expanding mass media lend such variation great significance. While some new uses for traditional epic materials are being found, valuable features of older, oral styles of storytelling are in danger of being lost.

Synopsis of the Brothers Story

The Tamil folk epic studied here is best known as the *Aṇṇanmār Katai,* or "The Story of Elder Brothers." Nonetheless, *The Three Twins* is really about triplets: two brothers and a sister. Though this account focuses mainly on the heroic exploits of the two males, the additional female is important to the understanding of key events. This hidden woman gives her twin brothers their magical power in battle and advises them on all issues. Significantly, the two boys are the first to exit from their mother's womb, in a scene describing the triple birth, and they thus become "elder" brothers. Addressing them in this fashion also lends them an aura of special respect. It hints at the fact that many people think of them as sacred ancestral figures.

The eight versions of the Brothers story I discuss begin their accounts at different points. Some versions describe two generations of family life before the birth of the heroic triad, some only one. The oral performance (B) and the dictated version (D) are special in that they provide a number of details about the grandparents of the heroes. In this sense they are the most complete, and it is those two accounts that are summarized here. All the versions are in essential agreement, however, about the main characters of the epic. That convergence becomes especially marked as the lives of the three twins draw to a close. Their deaths constitute the most-dramatic moment of the whole legend. A variety of ritual enactments celebrate the triplets' heroic demise and help to maintain a certain similarity across accounts at that point.

The Brothers story takes place in a small fifteenth-century kingdom, one of many in the area mainly under the control of local chieftains. A great, but vaguely described Chola king is linked to the beginnings of the heroes' family's good fortune. These events occur after a great famine, at a time when the grandfather of the triplets was forced to leave his home and locale to look for work. He is taken in by a Chola monarch and given agricultural duties. Prosperity and rain soon return to the area, and the grandfather's presence is interpreted as having caused the turn toward good fortune. In recognition of his important influence on events, and also for his dutiful service, the heroes' grandfather is awarded land. However, some resistance is encountered from a local artisan community that claims the same tract of land. The dispute is settled by a special ritual contest in which the grandfather wins and in which he also enjoys secret help from Lord Vishnu. As a result, the artisans become bitter rivals of the heroes' family, and in succeeding generations they always side with enemy forces.

Eight younger brothers of the honored grandfather receive neighboring tracts of land from the same Chola king. Here is the origin of a second feud, since the younger brothers are perpetually jealous of the eldest's holdings. Arguments over inheritance rights persist for three generations. The position of the eldest brother is soon weakened by his lack of sons. This situation emboldens the younger brothers in their schemes to take over his land. But eventually Vishnu and Śiva intervene to create a special child, who is hidden under a pile of rocks in one of the least-fertile fields. The eldest brother eventually finds the infant, adopts him, and raises him as his legitimate heir. But when the boy reaches the age of five, his loving parents suddenly die, and his uncles cruelly force him off his father's land. The young lad must wander through strange regions and fend for himself, but because of magical powers as well as help from Lord Vishnu, he survives many years of hardship. Finally, he grows to adulthood and manages to marry. Tāmarai, his bride, is seemingly unrelated, but she later turns out to be the boy's own mother's brother's daughter. Vishnu's hand can be seen here too. But the young hero is still very poor, and the girl's parents' bitter resistance to the match makes for additional family problems.

Following a set of peculiar nuptial ceremonies, which take place in a wasteland area, the new groom leaves with his wife in search of his own ancestral lands, and there he attempts to reestablish his

claims. Rival cousins, children of his father's brothers, are still carrying on the old tradition of jealous plotting. Rebuilding the family fortunes is not easy, but at last the palace is ready. Now the hero of the second generation arranges to invite the Chola king to the ceremonies, and the returned outcast gets himself installed as ruler. Despite some economic and political success in the second generation, the family's struggle with barrenness continues. Finally, an astrologer, who is Lord Vishnu in disguise, explains the reason: The family has been cursed because of an error made in the previous generation. The young ruler's father unwittingly caused the death of seven sacred cows. In recompense, Tāmarai must perform three times seven years of penance and go through seven death-like experiences herself.

After performing many pious deeds, Tāmarai finally fulfils the harsh requirements laid on her by fate. She spends twenty-one years in meditation on Mount Kailasa, at the very gates of Śiva's heavenly abode. There, Śiva finally yields and grants her magical triplets. (These three children reincarnate some key figures in the *Mahābhārata*—two Pāṇḍava brothers and their wife, Draupadī. But that well-known female will play a new role in the local epic. She will be a chaste, unmarried sister, not the heroes' bride.) Following the impregnation scene, Tāmarai returns to earth and is now able to impart fertility to many local animals who previously shared her barrenness.

When the rival cousins learn of Tāmarai's pregnancy, they begin to scheme anew. They hire an evil midwife and tell her to blindfold the queen during her labor and to kill any male children that exit from her womb. The mother must never see them. Fortunately this plan fails. Vishnu intervenes once more and arranges for a magical "Caesarean." The twin boys step out already fully formed as young warriors and are whisked away through a tunnel. They come to live under the temple of the family deity, Cellāttā, where they are raised on tiger's milk and protected by this goddess. Only the third member of the triad, the daughter, is born naturally, looks like a baby, and is discovered by the mother. The lack of male heirs gives the cousins a fresh excuse to grab the family lands. At age five, the heroic twins manage to rejoin their human parents, who are now suffering in exile. The two sons vow to lead their parents back home so that they may inhabit the old palace. The return is a success, but soon afterward their aging parents die.

Now several epic wars begin. First, the two male heroes, particularly the second, or younger, twin, take on the rival cousins. A great contest ensues in which they are helped by a pair of magical horses that they frequently ride across the land. The twins are also aided by an especially powerful untouchable named Cāmpukā, who serves as First Minister. The triplets, the horses, and the assistant were all born on the same day; thus the whole entourage shares a set of magical links. Together they oust the lineage rivals for good, the younger twin and Cāmpukā doing most of the necessary fighting. Later, after that threat is dismissed, the heroes go on to challenge their own Chola overlord. Leading a rebellion over taxation policies, the twins finally kill that great monarch, and from then on they are truly independent rulers.

But there is new trouble. A group of forest hunters are angry because the twins have been intruding on their territory and stealing game. The hunters build an alliance with a huge wild boar and connive with this beast to uproot the family's most-fertile fields. This vast destruction draws the heroes into a hunt for the boar. Finally, there is war with the hunters themselves. The heroes had first entered the hunters' territory because their sister had asked them to capture a parrot playmate for her. It was her wish for companionship that had led her brothers into trouble. Although the sister remains hidden in the house, her will and her visions serve as the central motivation behind these larger events.

The twins now rule their country as a pair. They act as one chief of state manifest in two bodies, and they command vast tracts of land peopled by thousands of loyal underlings. Nonetheless, the heroes must soon enter the forest to fight the hunters. Though they personally are not defeated in battle, thousands of their loyal followers fall, and the two rulers feel they can no longer return home. Their former perfect leadership is now sadly flawed. Several signs from Vishnu remind them that their predetermined life span of sixteen years is over. This realization prods the heroes toward their final decision: to take their own lives. They do so by deliberately falling forward on their great war swords. Their loyal First Minister follows suit.

The sister, who has been home all this time, immediately learns of the heroes' death in a dream and jumps up at the terrible news. First, she sees to the cremation of her brothers' wives, whom the heroes had been forced to marry just before their parents died. But the twins had never agreed to see or even to touch their unlucky brides,

who had been locked up in a separate house ever since their wedding. The sister now burns that dwelling to the ground, and through that violent act, the two wives unwillingly complete their ritual duties by joining their husbands in death. That accomplished, the sister begins to search for her brothers' bodies. She finds them deep in the forest and manages to revive the twins temporarily, just long enough for the three of them to exchange final words. Then the sister herself expires, and the spirits of the triplets are carried to heaven by Yeman, a divine executioner.

In the story it is mentioned that a set of local temples was built at the spot where the deaths occurred. Annual rituals are now held at the site, and other regional shrines sponsor similar annual festivals to celebrate the same events. These ceremonies are indicative of the great stature still accorded the three twins and their story in the Kongu area.

ONE

Place, Time, and Personnel

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE INDIAN EPIC

There are four ways in which Indian epic traditions seem to present a special subpattern, or oicotype, for study within the wider framework of Indo-European materials. (1) Indian epics are commonly built around a set of brothers, while in other epic cultures that is unusual. In Indian epics, several brothers often share a single, overall identity. Factionalism in these epics therefore occurs as splits between male cousins or as the struggles of a set of brothers against the wider world. In other epic traditions, such as in the Persian *Shahnama,* brothers sometimes murder one another. However, in the few Indo-European cases where two brothers are allied, like Menelaus and Agamemnon in *The Iliad,* their common cooperative efforts are peripheral to the story as a whole. The five Pāṇḍava brothers as a set, by contrast, provide a defining feature of the *Mahābhārata;* and Rāma and Laksmaṇa are of nearly equal importance in the *Rāmāyaṇa.* In the Brothers story, a set of heroic male twins, or of triplets if one counts the sister, hold a position of similar prominence. This centrality, a key structural feature of the local epic, is one of several features that link it firmly to a recognized, pan-Indian oicotype.[1]

(2) Indian epic traditions seem largely unique in their lack of focus on father-and-son struggles. Since this theme forms a key feature of

much Indo-European folk literature, its virtual absence from the Indian materials is striking. It would not be accurate to say that there are no oedipal antagonisms in Indian epics, but such rivalries are certainly suppressed to a faint smolder. A direct challenge by a son to a father is not allowed a conspicuous role in either epics or folk legends. Instead, as several others have noted, Indian fathers tend to wield perpetual control, even at their sons' expense.[2]

(3) Indian epics have a close association with ritual performances. The *Mahābhārata* is usually recited in temples or at festival gatherings. What is more important, large festivals (at least in South India) draw participants into these activities and encourage their identification with the main characters through ritual possession. Often that involves feats of considerable self-torture. Walking on fire, piercing the skin with skewers, or standing on knives are common means of demonstrating one's liaison with a story world. Devotional chanting provides another major means of appreciating central story events. These chanting sessions *(bajans)* also involve a spiritual transcendence of the normal sense of self. Through such participatory rituals and personal trance states, local populations in India annually relive their epic legends at local festivals. Similar, but perhaps even more dramatic, ritual events accompany the retelling of the Brothers story. Such intense ritual environments, linked to epic tale-telling, have so far been reported only from India.

(4) The Indian epic currently appears unique in the way heroes and heroines are regularly divinized at their death. The heroes of other Indo-European epic traditions are also semisacred figures, but in Indian stories, the main protagonists ascend rapidly to heaven after death. People remaining on earth then recognize their true divinity and establish appropriate shrines for their worship. The battleground, or other place where a hero's death occurred, is often treated as especially sacred. At Kurukshetra, where the great battle of the *Mahābhārata* took place, a huge festival is held whenever an eclipse of the sun occurs in that area. Pilgrims arrive from across the land to relive the heroes' final ordeal with each new solar cycle. Similarly, the battlefield mentioned in the Brothers story is a very sacred place. At the annual all-night rituals held there participants reenact the warriors' deaths. The tie between Indian epic heroes and the gods is so close that it is impossible for most audiences to treat them as separate concepts. Epic heroes, in India, are viewed as gods

that have come to earth.[3] Women and men who were heroes in real life are, similarly, destined to become divine beings after death. Though such ideas are not historically unique to India, they do seem to be a more-important current aspect of epic tradition there than elsewhere.

Charts 2 and 3 provide some back-up information for the first principle enunciated above: that many Indian heroes operate in sets of two or more, as cooperative siblings. Frequently one also finds a male ally who stands outside the descent group of the heroes, yet helps them in some major, almost magical way.[4] These patterns can be seen clearly in both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. They also pervade a number of other local epic accounts reported recently from other parts of India.[5] A sister is added to the male sibling set in a number of regionally specific tales, although not in the two great model stories.

Similarities in kinship structure link India's two major epics to many minor ones. But one classic Tamil epic, known throughout the southernmost state of India, does not fit these generalizations. The story of Kovolan and Kannaki, often referred to as the *Epic of the Anklet,* or *Silappadikaram,* dates from about the sixth century and is thought to have developed in a milieu relatively independent of northern, Brahmanical literary influences. Its very distinctive "southern" character shows up clearly in chart 2. None of the characteristic structural bonds between brothers, between brother and sister, or between a man and his special male ally are evident here. Even the parents of the main characters play a very minor role in this story. Although the account of the twin brothers shares more with the pan-Indian *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* than with this famous epic of the South, the heroines's behavior at the end of the *Silappadikaram* is reflected in the behavior of the sister at the end of the Brothers story. The latter, then, tends to blend classic pan-Indian themes with certain special southern features.

Reports on African folk epics seem to indicate a predominence of either single heroes or of competitive brothers.[6] Such materials are in clear contrast with South Asian epics, in which sibling unity and cooperation are stressed. Indian epics, a high-status genre, make unity a strong moral imperative for heroes, and the frame patterns in these accounts convey this norm of brotherly support most clearly. In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* this principle is imbedded

in the very structure of each story, since in each a pair of brothers are frequently seen together in cooperative roles. This basic principle is further reinforced by numerous dialogues that refer directly to a norm of unity and of mutual respect. The Brothers story is similar on both counts, except that its sibling unity is more often referred to through song images. This typical musical refrain illustrates the way the two individual brothers (plural references) alternate with symbolic references to their unity in the person of the elder (Ponnayyā):

> Ponnayyā's rule of justice, sweet rule
> The king ruled with authority, he ruled there
> Ponnayyā ruled with a golden signet ring on his finger
> It was a sweet rule
> The brothers ruled alone, they ruled there
> Ponnayyā the farmer ruled with a golden ring, he ruled there
> They ruled as masters of the country, they ruled there
> As farmers of the country, with golden rings, farmers there
> Lords of the earth, sweet Lords of that country
> Ponnayyā's good age, it rained, it rained there
> Kataku sampa paddy grew on the land, paddy grew there
> Ponnayyā's land was covered with rain . . .
> Oh flourishing country there!

Some sibling tensions are present in the *Mahābhārata.* They surface in the form of numerous verbal criticisms by the second brother, Bhīma, of his elder, Yudhisthira. Bhīma is the stronger and more tempestuous of the two siblings, and he often argues for action while his senior counsels restraint. The relationship between brothers in the Brothers story is similar. But one added feature of sibling tension appears in this local account—the physical aggression the younger hero exhibits toward his older brother in dreamlike passages. For example, he has a momentary vision (engineered by Lord Vishnu) in which he sees his older brother dressed in the clothes of Vēṭṭuva enemies. Thinking he is being attacked, the young brother throws his spear. Fortunately, the weapon never reaches its intended destination. His clairvoyant young sister manages to reach out and catch it in mid-flight. This scene is significant in two ways: It suggests that the young man harbors violent, but well-suppressed, feelings toward his brother, and it also shows the sister as the one who steps between them and keeps the peace. The appearance of a sister as

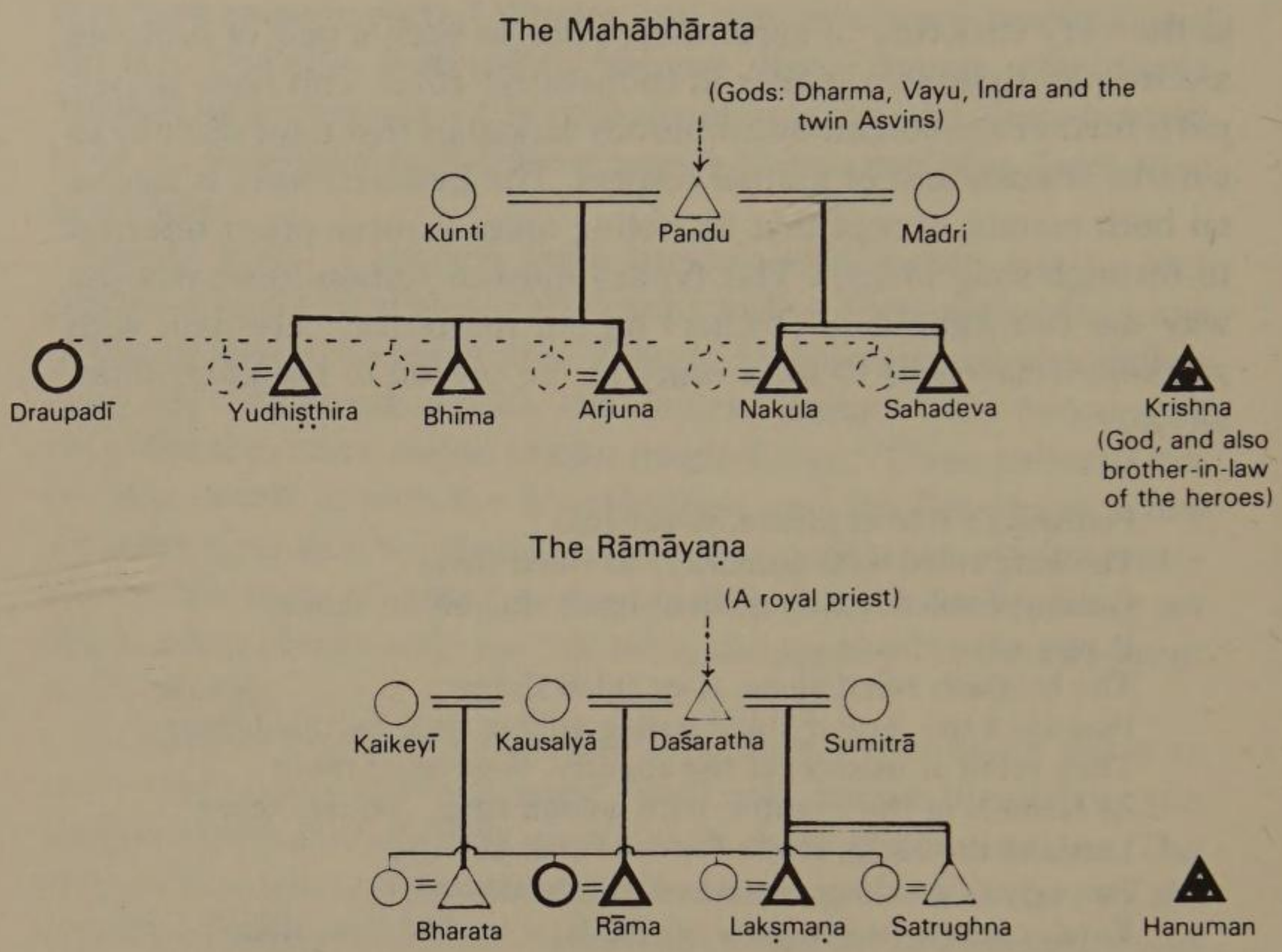


CHART 2. Basic Character Clusters for Two Classical Pan-Indian Epics and One Classical Dravidian Epic

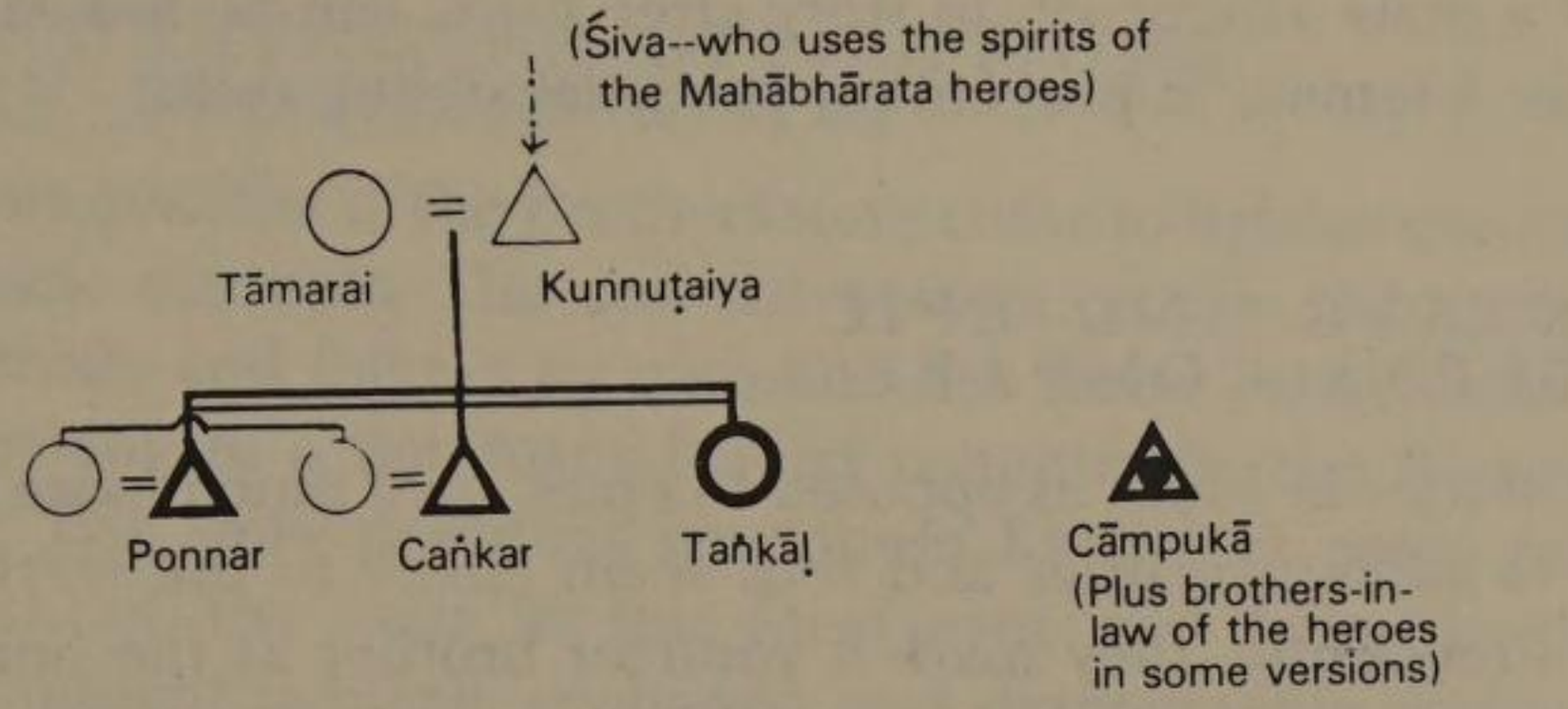


CHART 3. Basic Character Clusters for Several Indian Folk Epics

part of a male sibling set, in story after story, can be linked to this need for a female in preventing potential sibling splits.

FOLKTALE AND EPIC PATTERNS COMPARED

Folk stories in India, as opposed to epics, give much more prominence to sibling rivalries and thus seem closer to the world-wide norm. Frequently, they mark a younger brother as the hero. The epic genre in India severely limits sibling aggression and at best only allows the younger party to express such feelings in a verbal (or dreamlike) mode. Folktales allow for more physical violence between brothers and at times depict elder brothers aggressing against younger male siblings. Some kind of antagonism finds expression in roughly half of the fifty examples I have studied. Generally such events occur in the body of the story, and allow the younger subject to triumph toward the end. At other times, though, unity and cooperation prevail. The Brothers epic thus contains more sibling aggression than do truly classic stories of this genre. Yet it stands far closer to these great epics than to folktales. There, sibling rivalry is commonplace, and the elder is often outsmarted.

The principle of paired brothers finds further echoes throughout Indian folk epic literature. In a popular ballad from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, for example. Lorik cooperates with his brother while directing his aggression against brothers-in-law and other males who seek women he wishes to control personally. In the case of a sister, control can concern a brother long after both marry. Yet a sister remains a kind of goddess whose blessings can cause her brother either to fail or to prosper. This pattern is particularly well established in areas of India like Kongu, where Brahmanical influences remain weak.[7] Brothers, half brothers, and friends, however, generally remain trusted allies. They are the men who become go-betweens for a hero in times of crisis. Indeed, Indian epic heroes commonly marry sisters, as is the case in both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Brothers story. An even more extreme example is found in the *Mahābhārata*, where five heroic brothers are all married to the same woman. Loyal siblings or friends also follow one another in death in Indian legends, the second taking his own life after discovering that the first has just died.[8] This feature occurs in the Brothers story too, providing yet one more theme linking it to broad pan-Indian patterns.

BASIC CHARACTER OPPOSITIONS IN THE BROTHERS STORY

The epic qualities of the Brothers story come to light as one considers its basic concepts. The account centers on the history of one heroic family and follows its members for three generations. The heroes belong to a dominant landed community, the Kongu Kavuṇṭars.[9] The story describes how these Kavuṇṭars came to control much of the land in this local area and helps to justify their prominent political, economic, and demographic position today. It also reflects the fact that the local identity of this group is closely intertwined with images of the Kongu area as a whole. The Kongu (Vēḷāḷar) Kavuṇṭars are a non-Brahman community who proudly eat goat, sheep, and chicken meat (though they do not eat beef). The men are proud of their militaristic personalities, as well as of their agricultural skills. In sum, they are proud to be non-Brahmans. Much of the flavor of this local story stems from the central role of this caste in the account.

The basic themes of the Brothers legend touch on five core issues (see Chart 4) that form a structured, but also branching, hierarchy. At one end lies a basic theory about caste relations (or *varna*) and at the other a pattern of sibling rivalry within the nuclear family. As its overarching theme, then, this local epic opposes people responsible for territory (the Kashatriya *varna*) with those responsible for secondary production (Vaisyas). Further down this hierarchy, and within the landed category, it also distinguishes between those who till the soil and those who live by hunting. Just as the Kashatriyas are considered superior to the Vaisyas, so too are agriculturalists pitted against the hunters. The former are taken to be the primary and hence superior group.

According to a similar logic, the farmers of the story are all of one caste. Yet they are split into two antagonistic clans. Though these two descent groups have intermarried, a state of near warfare exists between them. At the next level of structure the same pattern is repeated, with factions dividing the principal descent group. Thus the offspring of one brother are now pitted against those of another (their patrilineal cousins) over the inheritance of land. Physical battles between these subgroups are described repeatedly. Each forces the other into exile at least once during the course of the story. Finally, at the lowest level of this structure, the two full-blooded brothers of the epic are twins. As in many other literatures of the world, these

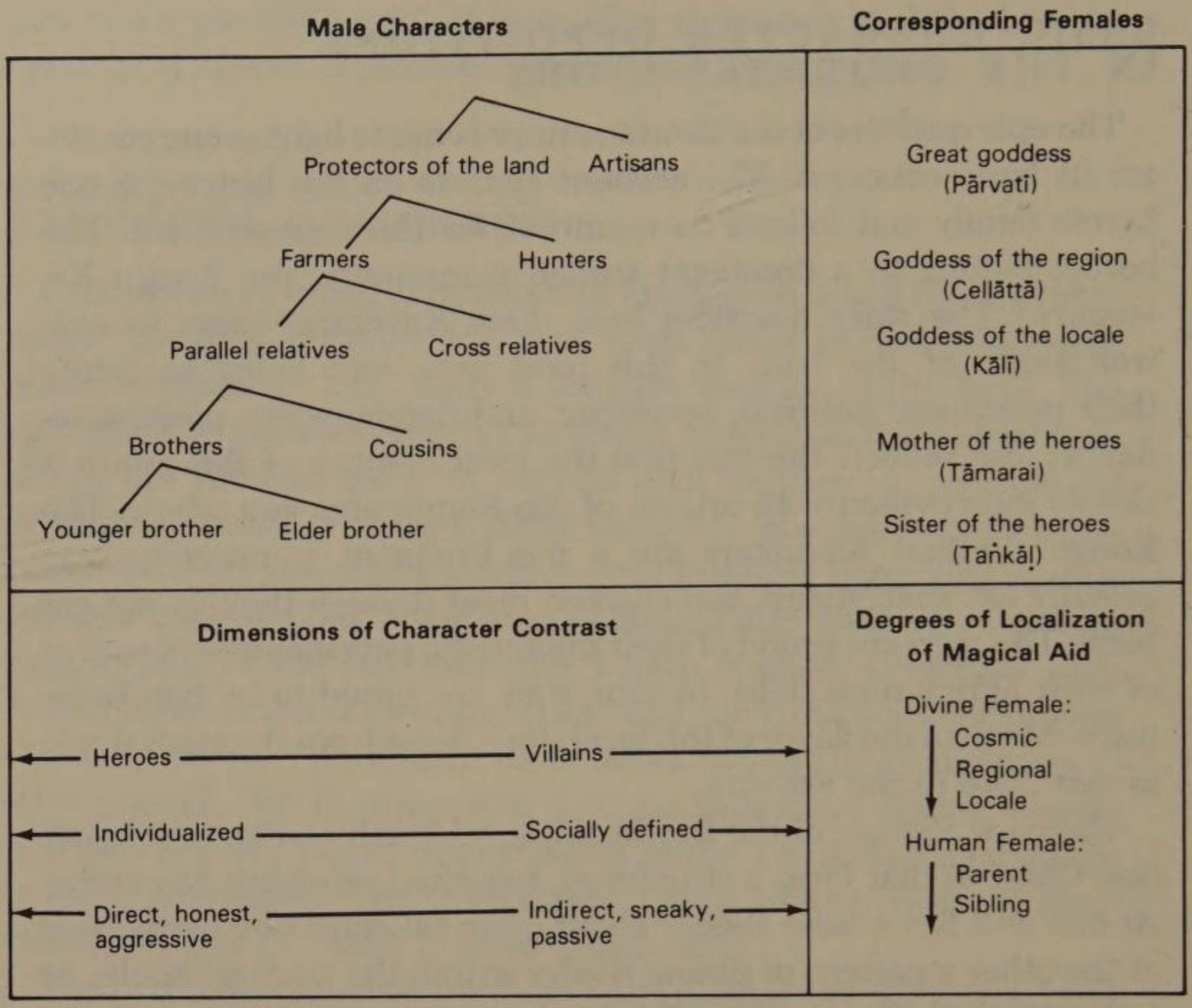


CHART 4. Basic Oppositions in the Brothers Story

men have almost opposite personalities. They exhibit a certain covert rivalry between themselves at many points, yet they present a united front to the larger world.

The oppositions depicted in the lower section of Chart 4 follow certain basic principles of character contrast. In each case the social identity described at the left is a positive label, a quality that forms part of the hero's own identity. Those on the right are linked to one or another type of villainy. Even the elder brother, who is generally seen as allied with his younger sibling, acts like a coward at several points in the bard's account. Similarly, groups that fall on the left side of the chart have individualized identities. Those on the right, by contrast, are defined by some wider status principle. In this way, then, the epic mocks individual submission to defined social roles and glorifies those who challenge these social givens.

The groups and persons on the left side of the chart are also given to honest, confident, aggressive behavior; those on the right tend to

act in passive, indirect, uncertain, or sneaky ways. This basic framework actually depicts an entire fabric for Indian society, starting with abstract social *(varna)* theory and working through smaller and smaller units, until specific sibling tensions in the family are reached. Together these rivalries form a complete and logical set. Each issue touches Hindu ideology and social theory at its core.

At each social level, and linked to each opposition of character, the Brothers story also develops a role for a powerful, semimagical female. Often this woman secretly aids the group or character on the left while undercutting the one on the right. For such females there are no clear-cut oppositions. Each woman blends into others, both above and below her in rank. Ultimately each is a more- or less-localized form of the great goddess herself.

GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is very likely that local bards have built the Brothers story on a specific local battle. A very complex edifice, one may speculate, was gradually constructed on that key historic fact. A tentative dating places the relevant military campaign at about 1450. Little information is available about that specific locale during this period in South Indian history, but general developments within Kongu at this time are well known. The Kongu area lies a little to the north and west of the area where the Brothers actually lived, and extant conditions there probably describe the story locale as well (see Map 1 in the Introduction).

Small political and economic outposts of Chola power had already been established along the upper reaches of the great Kāveri River by about 1200. The Kāveri marks the northern edge of the area known to these local heroes. The Cholas ruled a powerful political kingdom in South India during this period. Though the center of their empire lay on the sea coast, some distance away, these monarchs were intent on increasing their agricultural base in the interior. By expanding the number of farming settlements along the banks of their great river, they could better control its tributaries. Further, these kings kept an eye on important trade routes across the Indian peninsula, most of which led through these uplands toward ports on the west coast.

Gradually the Chola rulers took a more and more active interest in establishing new settlements in the interior. Before their empire

began to decline in the thirteenth century, large temples stood along all of Kongu's main waterways and trade routes. Various subregional territories, or *nāṭus,* also became firmly established in local tradition by this time. Indeed, descriptions of several similar *nāṭus* constitute the bulk of the political geography found in the Brothers story. Many important tank irrigation systems were built in Kongu during this era, and two such tanks play key roles in the local epic. This general pattern of agricultural expansion continued well into the fourteenth century, a period when a shift to Pandya dominance of the area occurred.

Similar changes began to affect people along the tributary streams of the Kāveri River just a little bit later, about 1400. These dry, upland areas, where the runoff was intermittent, were settled by succeeding generations of agriculturalists after the desirable basin areas had already been claimed. But hunting and gathering groups were already entrenched in such marginal locales, and newcomers to the tributary streams naturally met with resistance from those dependent on an upland style of life.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Ūraiyūr had become the capital of a local branch of Chola rulers. A number of other urban places were also expanding fast. Successive waves of artisans now moved rapidly into the uplands, taking advantage of the increased pace of construction. The epic town of Āniyappūr, might well have been one of the new centers established during this period. At the same time this area also received an influx of refugees from kingdoms overrun by political strife to the north. From an upland perspective, the arrival of so many newcomers meant a virtual invasion of older tribal territories. From an immigrant's standpoint, on the contrary, these local populations were perceived to be half-civilized, forest-dwelling groups. According to local legend, these tensions led to a great battle. The Vēṭṭuva hunters were defeated and forced to evacuate the area. A line separating the two groups is said to have been fixed at the town of Pūgalūr. Antagonistic feelings persist between these groups, even today.[10] Most Vēṭṭuvas are now established farmers, but they still tend to reside in distinctive settlement pockets surrounded by unrelated, Vēḷāḷar Kavuṇṭar landowners.

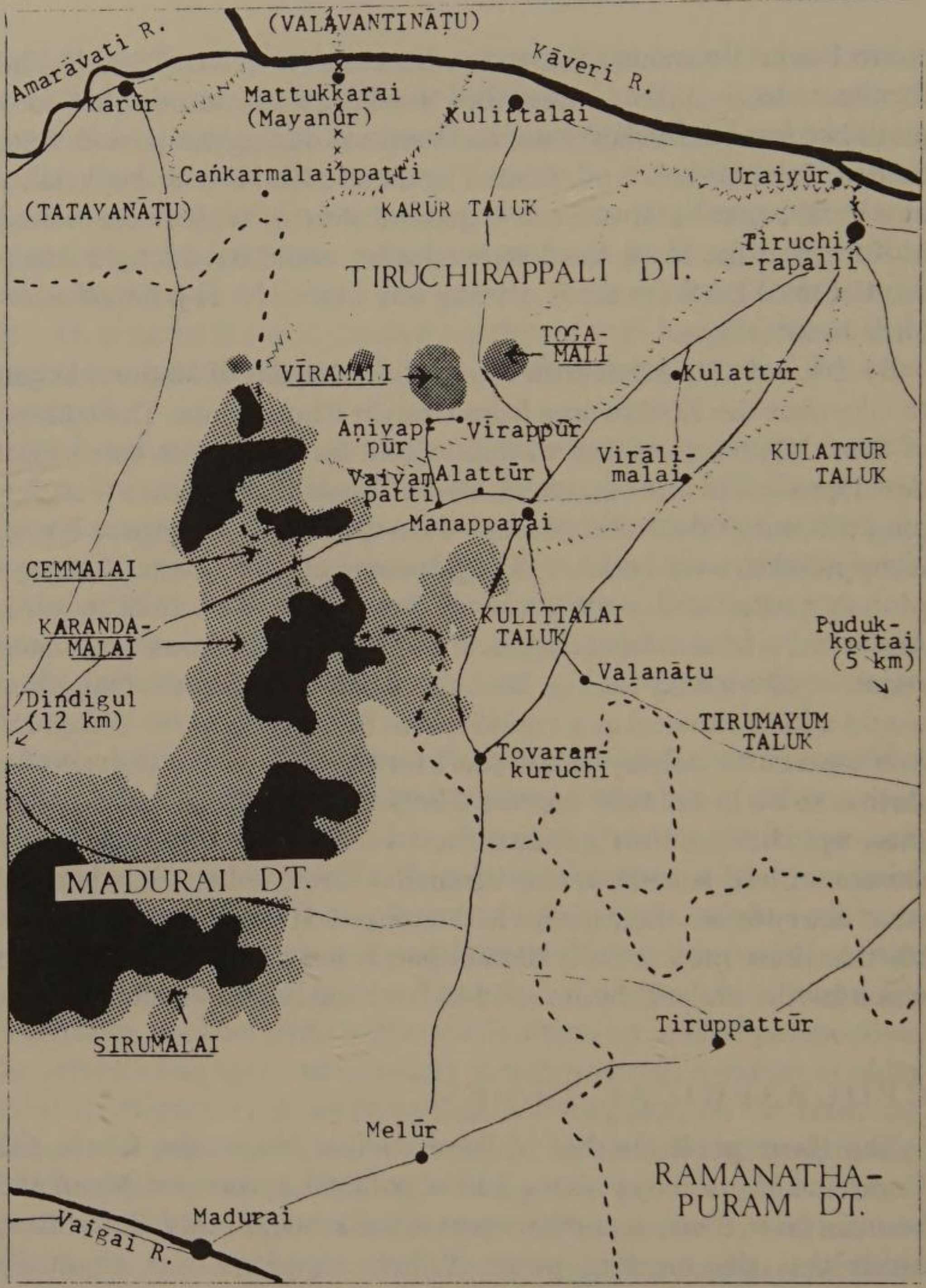
An old manuscript records that a Vēṭṭuva leader called Talaiyūr Kālī called the eighteen subdivisions of his group to arms at some point in the mid-fifteenth century.[11] Deva Chola of Ūraiyūr ruled this area (Kōnāṭu) about that time (1470). He, in turn, was subservient to Sadasivaraya of Vijayanagaram. Neither man, however, had much

control over Vīramalai, the area where Talaiyūr Kālī lived.[12] The Brothers story probably describes a military encounter that took place between the Vēḷāḷars and the Vēṭṭuvas during this period. And, indeed, Talaiyūr Kālī is mentioned by name as the heroes' key enemy in several story variants. Since a general state of lawlessness existed in Kōnāṭu at the time, this Vēṭṭuva leader could have fought a substantial local battle without causing any higher-level political overlords to intervene.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Nāyaks of Madurai began to take over the Kōnāṭu area from Ūraiyūr Chola scions. The coming of these Nāyak rulers sets an upper limit for dating the epic's local development. In one version studied a Nāyak king is shown worshipping the story's deceased heroes. More specifically, Kampaya Nāyak is supposed to have been a leading devotee of these twins. Kampaya probably ruled under the great Sri Rangaraya, from 1642 to 1672. Any ritual tradition honoring local military heroes, however, would require quite a long time to become socially established. Only then would a king situated at a considerable distance agree to recognize it. If we assume a delay of 200 years for the story to develop and for shrines to be built, 1450 seems a likely time for the actual death of these epic heroes. Furthermore, most versions insist that the Brothers committed suicide in the Vīramalai forest, when they learned what heavy losses their troops had endured. It seems equally plausible that these men actually died in battle and that the act of suicide was a bardic embellishment added later for heroic effect.[13]

GEOGRAPHICAL CLUES

The three great families of South Indian kings—the Chola, the Cera, and the Pandya—once had a political agreement about the boundaries of their respective areas of influence. Local folk tradition insists that the meeting point of their kingdoms was physically marked by three temples to Lord Ganesh (one constructed by each ruler). These shrines still stand, at a place near Matukkarai, on the south bank of the Kāveri River. The Chola area is said to have stretched to the east of this spot, the Cera territory to the north and west (above the Kāveri and Amarāvati rivers), and the Pandya lands to the south. A bund that ran southward from Matukkarai clarified the line of demarcation.[14] A northern branch of the Kāveri River marked the continuation of that boundary above Matukkarai. A location near the mutual boundary point of these several political em-



Map 2. Local Area of the Brothers Story
Adapted from *National Atlas of India*, 1961. Trivandrum Plate 37: Physical.

pires would certainly have been a likely place to find local families wishing to gain some measure of political independence. A number of other place names mentioned by the story are listed in Appendix IV.

Version I of the story replaces the heroes' Chola overlord with a Pandya one. Such a claim is plausible. The Pandya kings also had an important historical influence over the area. Madurai, the Pandya capital, lay only slightly farther south of Valanāṭu than Ūraiyūr lay to the north. That version further claims that the heroes' mother performed her penance at the famous Mīnakshi temple in Madurai city. Despite these differences, all eight versions of the Brothers story agree that the twin heroes died in the Vīramalai. Most of the heroic events described in this story occur in or near these hills. Equally important, no other region disputes the primacy of the Vīramalai as a pilgrimage site for devotees. Today a major shrine honoring the Brothers stands in Vīrappūr, a town that lies at the foot of these hills. All versions also agree that it was men of the Vēṭṭuva community who served as the heroes' ultimate challengers.

Similarly, there is agreement about the name Valanāṭu, the locale where the heroes' father finally settled. Indeed, a small village called Valanāṭu[15] still exists in the Vīramalai region. This settlement lies about 24 kilometers southeast of the town of Vīrappūr, and the people there claim that the heroes of the Brothers story once lived in their village. They point to the foundations of a great wall (now half buried in the ground) to prove their claim. Another variant of the story clarifies the situation by saying that Valanāṭu was the site of the heroes' fort. A huge wall there makes that a possibility.[16] Other versions use Cirukkāmpuliyūr (not located) or Ālattūr (twenty kilometers to the northwest) as the location of the heroes' private residence. The town of Āniyappūr, also named repeatedly in several versions, is a place where artisans and Brahmans are said to have lived. A small town with this name actually exists near Vīrappūr. It could well have supplied the whole area with professional services.

Another line of geographic evidence that runs through the story concerns the poetic name Kōnāṭu ("land of cows"). This term appears in many songs about the heroes' home area. Kōnāṭu is known from inscriptional evidence.[17] The town of Ūraiyūr served as the seat for several fifteenth-century rulers who claimed sovereignty over this area. In one version, Ūraiyūr is the name given to the place where the heroes' overlords lived. Ūraiyūr also lies about 45 kilometers from

Ālattūr, about the right distance in terms of story geography. The heroes' grandfather's name, Kōlatta, also supports a link to this Kōnāṭu locale. Kōlatta can mean, among other things, "the grandfather of Kōnāṭu."

One can also search for the area described as the natal home of the heroes' mother. According to the story, it could be reached on foot in two days. But in all the descriptions of comings and goings between this region and the heroes' own, no river crossing is ever mentioned. Hence, her father's lands would have to have been south of the Kāveri River. Such details tend to support a local tradition that says the heroes' mother came from Cankarmalaippatti, and that her wedding was celebrated on the crest of a local rock outcropping near there. The rock referred to is marked by sixteen symmetric, badly weathered holes that looked as if they could have supported the posts of a wedding canopy. In 1965, when I visited the site, these holes were in immediate danger of destruction by a local rock-quarrying gang. The outcropping itself, however, must still be visible. It lies about 50 kilometers northwest of Valanāṭu, not far from the south bank of the Kāveri River.[18]

STORY DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME

Setting a likely date for the Vēṭṭuva war with the Brothers, however, tells one nothing about how the story itself developed. All the versions available are relatively modern in diction. They also provide few clues as to their authors or to the dates of composition. Some modern references, such as the heroes' need for "German" iron, have undoubtedly been added to the story recently. Very old mythological materials have also become attached to it. Most likely, the whole story has slowly been expanded "backwards." Thus, information on the heroes' father and grandfather probably was added later than were the core descriptions of military battles. Chart 5 provides one guess as to the way various themes may have been woven together.

It seems especially likely that various female roles were added as the story was built up. The first woman introduced would appear to be the heroes' sister. Somewhat later, perhaps, the twins also acquired a mother and a pair of wives. Adding this kind of family context makes it much easier to link the story with wider historical issues. Then, to give some local flavor to that history, various castes

Chart 5. Historical Background of the Brothers Story

Chronology of the Kongu Region of Tamilnadu, 11th Century to 18th Century

1000 Branch development of Kongu rulers. Kōnāṭṭan reigns from 1005 to 1075.
1100 Colonists from coast begin to arrive in area under Chola auspices. Settlements spread up the Kāveri River.
1200 Reign of Karikala Chola (Kulotunga III). Social expansion continues. Temples constructed. Nāṭu names established.
1300 Pandiya names become prominent in inscriptions. Tank irrigation developed.
1400 New settlements penetrate up tributary streams. Taliyūr Kālī Vēṭṭuva attacked by Vēḷāḷars about 1460? Ūraiyūr established as Chola capital.
1500 Pace of urban development increases. Influx of artisans. Extensive occupation of interfluvial areas.
1600 Beginning of Nāyak rule. Kampaya Nāyak worships the heroes of the Brothers story as local divinities.
1700 Beginning of British records. About 40% of land area still forested.

Suggested Development of the Story by Local Bards, 16th Century to the Present

The Grandfather — *The Father* — *The Sons* — *Local Divinities*

Epic Time (Generations)

Core Historical Event, 16th Century: Two Vēḷāḷar brothers defend their territory against Vēṭṭuva raids led by Talaiyūr Kālī.

The men become local Vēḷāḷar heroes. Their story is told locally and shrines develop. Kampaya Nāyak, a local ruler, worships the heroes.

Various castes dependent on the Vēḷāḷar community (especially Nāṭārs) develop shrines dedicated to the story's heroes.

Roles for a sister, a mother, and wives added.

Information about the father and the local region, using links to Chola rulers (especially Karikala) added.

Memories of the early settlement of Kōnāṭu under Chola auspices added.

Themes of cousin rivalry, banishment, and magical birth of the father added.

Mythical material about the birth of the Vēḷāḷar community added.

of the region would also have been included. The father of the heroes is also linked to the names of Śiva and Karikala, Chola kings who ruled this area in the thirteenth century. The grandfather, Kōlatta, is tied to mythical materials that describe the origins of the Vēḷāḷar community as a whole.[19] It would seem that various bits of what local bards knew about the past were added to the story in such ways. These accretions probably took a considerable period of time to develop.

Of special importance for this study is the frame or shape that was given to these many additions. Among other things, such details give the account historical depth. They also lend stature to the main characters and thereby enhance the legend's ritual potential. A similar embroidery further serves to link the whole to several classical and pan-Indian epic themes. A role for the major gods, for example, must have been part of the story since early times. Finally, it seems that various local communities gradually adopted the epic heroes as their private clan and caste deities.

It is not possible to trace the specific history of the Brothers story, of course, but a few details about the milieu in which it has been nurtured will further illustrate the processes of development just discussed. Folk bards, particularly in the period before mass communication media became well established, were continually developing newsworthy local incidents into story or ballad format. Printing was introduced relatively early in South India, and by the turn of the century some folk compositions each year were printed as broadside pamphlets for popular purchase. The British were very thorough in recording the work of Indian presses during this period, and my quick check of the publication records has turned up a number of popular ballad topics. A skimming of the record for 1918 alone produced the following unknown works:

Ballad of a tusker that killed a man
Ballad about the evidence of the pet parrot relating to a murder in Hyderabad
Ballad of the evidence given by Lord Venkatēswara in a civil case at Dharmapuri
Ballad of a double murder said to have been committed by one Gopal Nayakar
Ballad of a strike of the employees of the Madras Electric Tramway
Ballad about the severe famine of 1918–19
Ballad of the drunkard

The Brothers story probably flourished in a story milieu in which many legends like those listed above were circulating. Most never grew past the initial stages of composition and retelling. But some developed and took on special significance, especially those recounting incidents that had some combined social and historical significance. The story of Rāmappaiyan is a good example of a legend that has been preserved and now has the status of a popular epic. Its emphasis is on a war between a great Nāyak ruler of Madurai City and Rāmappaiyan, a local chieftain who controlled much of the agricultural territory surrounding this center. The Nāyak was a Brahman and a Telugu speaker, hence an outsider, while the local leader was a warlike figure, and a Tamil belonging to the Maravar caste. The latter leader lacked ritual status and pan-cultural political credentials, but could easily stand as a symbol of local customs and of local pride. Two opposed characters of this kind are tailor-made for use as metaphoric vehicles in a wider cultural and political debate. It is thus not surprising that this story was enlarged and has continued to flourish. Significant, too, is the fact that although the Nāyak ultimately wins, the Maravar's son-in-law is the martyr and true hero of the story.[20]

True history, in the sense of an accurate description of events, can never be learned from such story texts. But a lot can be learned concerning the way people think about history. When local bards and storytellers recount the legend of these two Vēḷāḷar brothers, they work within a larger political and cultural milieu, about which they have very strong feelings. When such people look to the larger cultural traditions of India, they see an overarching status accorded to persons of Brahman birth. Indeed, this whole story revolves around local feelings of ambivalence about that larger Indian ideological framework. The twin brothers symbolize the dilemma posed by such Brahman status claims through the interplay of their own personalities. The elder is a meek and philosophical man, while the younger is extremely fierce. Peasant audiences make the latter the real winner. Local men can easily share the feeling that his personal heroism and bravery make him the equal of his elders. Like this "younger twin," local storytellers and audiences believe that they also deserve a respect they rarely get from outside officials, Brahmans, and other more-educated men.

TWO

Ritual Dimensions of the Story

REENACTMENT RITUALS

Albert Lord has suggested that many European epics derive from religious cults. He has also argued that their performance once involved ritual invocations intoned by specialized seers.[1] Such ritual traditions, in which the priests are storytellers, are still strong in the Tamil-speaking areas of South India. In this region local audiences develop a strong sense of identification with an epic's main heroes. Under such circumstances the retelling of an epic story causes the past and the present to merge. A temporary union of these two separate times is achieved. But the cyclical and highly invocational structure of these local rituals also emphasizes another principle, the timeless or life-defying dimensions of such proceedings.

The striking feature of the epic reenactment rituals is that members of the audience dramatize the events themselves, in a spontaneous manner. The role of the professional bard is merely to chant excerpts from the story. This chanting is rather different from his ordinary narration, however. The structure is now highly repetitive. Instead of loosely ordered sequences, the lines are grouped into quatrains, and the tone is one of invocation. There is very little progression of the action. Instead, these ritual recitations consist mainly of catalogues of traits: the heroes' good looks and their fine characters, the beautiful countryside, the sister's forebodings, and various subsequent signs of distress.

One specific segment of the story always provides the backdrop for these ritual performances—the scene of the twin brothers' final battle, their death, and their later revival. This section is deliberately sung at annual festivals, where ritual participation by the audience is expected. An unplanned involvement of the audience may also occur when the story is sung informally over several nights. When it does occur, it happens only on the night when the heroes' deaths are described.

Male members of rural audiences identify so strongly with the epic heroes that during bardic performances they feel possessed by the heroes' spirits. As the bard's description of the final battle is developed, the mood of the crowd gradually shifts. The men begin to sway back and forth, and their eyes become glazed. Some of those affected may have vowed earlier to undergo this possession as a kind of personal sacrifice. But no one knows in advance exactly who will be chosen. As the spiritual force emanating from a hero enters a man, he will slowly stand up. Sometimes this "takeover" is intentionally encouraged by the bard's assistants. They often move among the audience and drum with loud, rhythmic tones into the ears of potential participants, but at some performances, the same mood is achieved without special aids.

After the spirits have taken hold, the participants whom they have selected will try to seize any weapon in sight. Often, in anticipation of this need, swords and shields are laid out, in advance, against the shrine of a clan ancestor. Otherwise, simple sticks, or even just violent arm movements, serve as substitutes. Once on his feet, each possessed man begins a period of wild swirling and swaying. More and more persons gradually join this melée. The group of possessed men moves about in a kind of open arena, contained by the festive crowd. After fifteen or twenty minutes of "dancing" or "fighting," the participants begin to fall to the ground. Sometimes bystanders help them back to their feet, but they soon fall again. After a time the ground is covered with bodies. Assistants (they, too, may be volunteers) pick them up and move them to a "graveyard" along one side of the larger area. A certain stiffness is evident as the "corpses" are carried. The limbs of the fallen men are not limp but behave more like wooden boards. Often hip, shoulder, and knee joints appear locked in place.

The corpses are gradually arranged in a neat line in the designated area. The growing queue is organized along a north-to-south axis,

with each body lying on its back with its feet extended to the east (the most common orientation for a true corpse). The men are then covered with white cloth (another sign of a funeral). Any untouchables who have participated (there should be at least one, according to custom) are also laid out, as above, but slightly separated from the other bodies. Next, the appointed bard is called over and asked to recite the exact segment of the story in which the heroes beg the gods for their return to life. He must do so with great accuracy, and the crowd, therefore, is silent. During this recitation a ritual assistant sprinkles a little water from a hand-held pot over each supine body. Each participant then returns magically to life, rising slowly to a sitting position. After this climactic event, a short worship is usually conducted at a nearby shrine. Food offerings are set out and distributed to the entire crowd in a familiar manner.

These ritual enactments have a tremendous impact on the men who undergo the experience. The individuals, their lives, and their bodies become encompassed by a larger meaning through these ritual events. The self-selected participants share the personalities and life space of the story's heroes and actually pass through death with them. These occurrences are considered highly dangerous and magical. If the bard does not sing the key passages accurately it is said that the men lying dead on the ground can never be revived. Such an experience, powerful even for the onlooker, must be extremely moving for those who take part. Those who become possessed let the spirits of the heroes into their own bodies and then become these heroes in a very real sense.

MAGICAL VERSES USED

In 1966 these key performance events were tape-recorded at a small village temple in the center of the Kongu region (see Appendix II, Map 5). Certain critical lines are customarily recited by the bard at the end of the proceedings, just as the bodies of the participants are sprinkled with water. In his song, the bard takes on the role of the heroes' sister. He then calls upon the heroes' spirits in a stirring, invocational tone. It is almost as if these men had already become divinities. He calls them "powerful warriors," men so strong they can split lions in two. He implies that the Brothers are not really dead, but merely affected by certain evil eyes (Vēṭṭuva enemies?) lurking in the dreadful forest. Calling on Śiva, the great creator, the song

expresses confidence that the heroes *will* now rise to their feet. When the Brothers are revivified, all the other dead warriors on the battlefield return to life with them. The final lines then make an announcement: The dead men *have* come back to life. Next they look straight at their devoted sister and thus confirm the importance of their bond with her. Happiness fills their hearts.

Last Lines of the Sister's Lament
(As sung by a bard at the Taiyampāḷaiyam festival, 1966)

Brother, evil eyes have harmed you
My powerful warrior of the battlefield
My tigerlike king who can split a lion
Hear my voice in the forest of the Vīramalai

The evil eye looked upon you, brother
In the wretched forest of Vīramalai
Oh, powerful creator
Both of you will get up

When my voice is heard, oh Śiva the creator
If my brother wakes up
All the dead warriors will get up
Oh Śiva, creator, excellent one

IN THE FOREST OF VĪRAMALAI
AFTER GETTING UP
AND LOOKING AT THE NOBLE WOMAN
BOTH BROTHERS WERE HAPPY

(Capital letters express a narrative voice, lower-case letters the sister's voice.)

This excerpt consists of the last four quatrains of the bard's long lament. Earlier, the bard described the sister's search for her brothers in the forbidding forest and her eloquent weeping over their bodies. The temple in which the festival was held owns a palm-leaf manuscript (Version H) that contains a more-extensive text of the same lament. It seems to serve as a reference work for bards who wish to learn the correct incantations. In content, the manuscript and the actual festival performance are surprisingly consistent, although in performance the number of quatrains was reduced from 150 to 55 (see Chart 6).

The bard made some interesting content choices in his reenactment. For one, he shortened the whole description of the death scene by roughly 63%. A focused, concise version that highlights

CHART 6. The Sister's Lament

Topic of the verses (in order)	Number of verses: Temple manuscript (Version H)	Number of verses: Festival performance (Version F)	Reduction
The Brothers' justice and honesty	5	4	20%
The land the Brothers ruled	11	4	65%
The Brothers' prowess, military camp, tents, and flags	8	2	75%
The battles the Brothers fought (and might fight)	15	8	47%
Tańkāḷ's dreams	15	0	100%
Tańkāḷ's sheltered life	7	0	100%
How the Brothers went to battle and Tańkāḷ's search	40	4	90%
How the serpent guides Tańkāḷ	6	0	100%
Tańkāḷ's lament over her brothers' bodies	12	10	17%
Tańkāḷ's weeping for her brothers	16	11	31%
How Tańkāḷ casts a sort of spell over the bodies so that no harm will come to them	6	8	(+33%)
The revival procedures	8	3	62%
How the two Brothers got up	1	1	0%
	Total 150	Total 55	Average reduction 63%

some of the text's major themes is better suited to the limited attention span of a local audience. The bard totally eliminated most of the verses describing the normal, home-bound life of the heroes' sister (Tańkāḷ). Instead he focused on the two male heroes, giving comparatively full coverage to their military prowess and to descriptions of the battles they fought. He also included considerable material on Tańkāḷ's final search for her brothers in the forest. One detail, a description of her casting a spell over her brothers' bodies, so as to protect them from harm, was actually expanded in the performance. All these shifts indicate the bard's considerable sensitivity to the local festival context. The verses selected are ones that hold special interest for ritual participants and enable them to identify readily with the heroes' spirits, which are thought to be controlling their bodies.

The final four verses of this ritual lament are not substantially different in the manuscript and the tape-recording, though certain

changes were made to accommodate the presence of an assistant singer and the demands of a musical dialogue between him and the lead bard. Yet the meaningful content of the final quatrains of these two variants remains quite close. About 33% of the wording is exactly the same, although the festival variant has a few extra phrases and epithets. More significant is the fact that in the manuscript the sister commands her brothers to get up, while the bard chose to address the fallen "heroes" in the future tense, adding an "if" clause.

Temple manuscript (Version H)	*Festival performance (Version F)*
You warriors, get up fast!	Both of you will get up
.....	.....
Brothers get up!	If my brother wakes up
.....	.....
All you commanders get up fast!	All the dead warriors will get up

This variation, too, seems to indicate the bard's subtle response to a performance situation. Even though he is impersonating the heroes' sister, the singer cannot order key magical events. Instead he must express deference to the invisible presence of Lord Śiva. The use of the future tense suggests his own faith in Śiva's all-pervasive power. God alone will see to it that the festival participants are safely revived.

THE RITUAL LAMENT IN GENERAL

Phrases used in the ritual lament are highly repetitive. Such cere-monial performances contrast markedly with the informal narrative style of a bard telling the same story merely for entertainment purposes. The temple manuscript and the recorded performance do not differ in this matter of ritual style.

Temple manuscript (H)

a. Brother, you are a Vēḷāḷar for (your) word
f_1 My royal farmer with a heavy head of hair
f_2 In our country, in any dispute
b. Both of your brothers are men of justice in any dispute

c. Brothers (your) justice will never go wrong
f_3 You, the royal farmer with a big name and reputation
f_4 In our town of Ālattur, in the beautiful Country Where the Kāveri Flows
d. My brothers' promises will never be falsified

Festival performance (F)

a. Brother, you are a Vēḷāḷar for (your) word
f_5 My jewel-chested and royal-footed one
f_6 My Lord of the Country Where the Ganges and the Kāveri Flow
b. Both of you brothers are men of justice in any dispute
c. Brothers, your justice will never go wrong
f_1 My royal farmer with a heavy head of hair
f_7 My own brother, the king who wears a garland
d. My brothers' promises will never be falsified

These lines have a strong invocational quality. Little action is described, and there is little progression in terms of topic. Instead, each line is heavily descriptive of qualities rather than of events. Each quatrain is rather like a sandwich: The first and last lines (a,b,c,d) of each grouping remain relatively fixed across versions, and the bard of the oral performance clearly took the care to memorize these outer lines. But the inner lines of each set vary widely. These inside lines can be called the "filling," as opposed to the basic frame of the lament. The filling occurs over and over again in many verses and provides the whole with its highly repetitive tone. Though phrases used in the filling do not recur in a fixed order, repeats are frequent enough to make each line familiar. These phrases help induce a trancelike state in the listening audience.

In the above example each line of filling has been marked with the notation "f_x." Seven distinct lines are shown. The eighth is a repeat of the first. Four lines praise the heroes; three others praise the glory of the setting.

f_1 My royal farmer with a heavy head of hair
f_3 You, the royal farmer with a big name and reputation
f_5 My jewel-chested and royal-footed one
f_7 My own brother, the king who wears a garland

f_2 In our country, in any dispute
f_4 In our town of Ālattur, in the beautiful Country Where the Kāveri Flows
f_6 My Lord of the country where the Ganges and Kāveri flow

Together, these phrases and others like them form an unending cycle of exultation, making the whole into a ritual psalm of praise.

Many of the verses stress the bountiful richness of the Brothers' lands and so provide an important frame for everyday experience. Significant, too, is the fact that more and more images of foreboding are used as the recitation progresses, creating a dramatic, climactic structure. A lurking threat to all this prosperity is seen in the bad dreams of the heroes' sister. Bleak omens of the future are hidden there. Images of the evil enemy are also inserted from time to time, balancing frequent positive imagery with occasional negative tones.

The land

Fertile land
Land of gold
Beautiful land
Land of the fertile Ponni River
Land of the fertile Ganges
The red coral land
Land full of elephants
Land full of horses
Heavy rain
Rain twice a month
Regular showers
Miles of irrigated land
Irrigation water flowing for great distances

The enemies

Malicious hunters
Enemies
Country of thieves
Deceitful men
Treacherous men
(Those in) the wretched forest

Dreams of foreboding

The fort had broken/fallen
Grass was growing in the fort
There were sparrows in the fort
There was darkness
An (elephant's) tusk has been broken
The war was lost

If the lament's imagery is attractive at first, it is also dangerously seductive. Those who allow the spirit of the Brothers to possess them will enter a world where danger lurks. Set within the general frame of prosperity are a great many specific images of the Brothers themselves. These men represent a local ideal. Their description provides a set of characteristics toward which others strive. A participant can identify with these men and yet see himself in humble comparison.

The picture of the Brothers given in the temple manuscript has three aspects: these men are kings, they are farmers, and they are warriors. Their royalty is further attested by numerous signs of their status: flags, a great crown, and a fine title. A claim to local status is bolstered by descriptions of their fine palace and of their authority over the people of a nearby town. Above all, the Brothers hold this high status by virtue of their sense of truth and justice. They rule with a kind, yet firm, hand.

CHART 7. Images of the Brothers in One Ritual Chant (Version F)

AS KINGS:

Associations with kingship
Distinction of a king
Holding a distinguished title
King of the earth
Hero of extended fame
Powerful king
Handsome king
Famous king
My king
Famous in a crowd
Flag bears a parrot sign
Flag bears a pearl sign
Flag is tent of other kings
Mounted on a horse
Astride an elephant
Wearing a crown
A great crown
A golden crown
A crown of pearls
A bejeweled crown

Associations with justice
Having a sense of justice
A judge of all
One of correct decisions
You keep your word
Your words never fail
Your promises are kept
You never speak falsely

Loyalty of subordinates
While walking people surround you
While sitting people gather
If you look out people gather
While standing people gather
Your visits make people gather

The palace scene
Coconut trees in front
Lady-finger trees in the courtyard
An elephant shed
Many horse stalls
A corner for swords
A corner for spears
A well in the back yard
A white elephant
A towered entrance
A full audience hall
A crowded palace door
People gathered in numbers
A royal court

The town
The streets flow with honey

AS FARMERS:

Agricultural prosperity
The paddy will grow
There will be a heavy harvest
The bananas will fructify
The palms will yield coconuts
A house full of honey
The haystack of rice will grow
The ears of maize will yield bountifully
The fertile land
Land of horses and elephants

Agricultural abilities
Can open the irrigation sluice
Can open the sluice with a finger
Can make the water flow
Can thresh with elephants

AS WARRIORS:

Association with warlike activities
Can fight the enemy hunters
Master of war
One who went to war
Hero of war
Battlefield hero
Hero of endurance
My warrior
Farmer of the battlefield
Great warrior
Commander
Farmer hero
Hero of extended fame

Association with weapons of war
Swinging a shield
Swinging a spear
Lifting a silver spear
Sending arrows
Bearing a sword and shield
Bow-bearing hero
Archer Arjuna
Warrior with a bow
Bearing an arrow
Having an iron fort
Having a brick fort

Powerful body and good looks
Only sixteen years old
Can split a lion in two
Powerful shoulders
Thunderlike voice
Handsome and great man

More interesting even than the identification of these men with royalty are numerous references to them as farmers. These heroes not only rule a prosperous domain but also have the skills and competence to farm. No less significant is the tremendous stress on the heroes' warlike abilities. They are linked to scenes of battle and described wielding the weapons of war. They are also graced with powerful, healthy bodies. This amalgam of fighter, farmer, and social ruler is precisely the ideal that the members of the Kavuṇṭar community hold before themselves today. The expression of these values in a ritual chant is significant. The men who so closely identify with the heroes' spirits during the reenactment of their final moments must have a sense of their individual lives being briefly touched by these ideal qualities.

These epic rituals are not just for the men. Although only they rise to reenact the heroes' final moments, the audiences are full of women, and these ceremonial chants have the structure of a female lament. Dirge singing is an important and strictly female skill in Tamilnadu. The women of this region have a highly developed ability to compose and to sing expressive songs over the bodies of dead relatives.

Dirge singing occurs regularly at village funerals and constitutes an important part of local culture. Women who sing well are greatly admired, and good singers often compete publicly in a congenial way. When a male bard sings at epic-linked events, he must impersonate the heroes' sister. He sings the laments she sang on the way into the forest. When she finds her brothers' bodies the words used must be exact if those participating in the rituals are actually to return to life. The success of the proceedings ultimately depends, therefore, on the skill of a "female" singer. By implication, her magical abilities rest on her chastity, which imbues her with special power and allows her to bring dead relatives back to life.

Women do not bring the dead back to life in an everyday setting, of course. But women do compose dirges for relatives of all kinds. Perhaps the strongest emotional bond in these songs is that between a woman and her brothers. Indeed, the deep sense of attachment and of mutual responsibility sisters and brothers share is central to understanding the kinship system of the whole Dravidian culture area.[2] The Brothers story picks up on this local cultural premise and makes it a key part of the ritual proceedings. Throughout the temple manuscript (H) one finds repeated references to the importance of the brother/sister bond. The sister repeatedly calls out "Oh brother" or

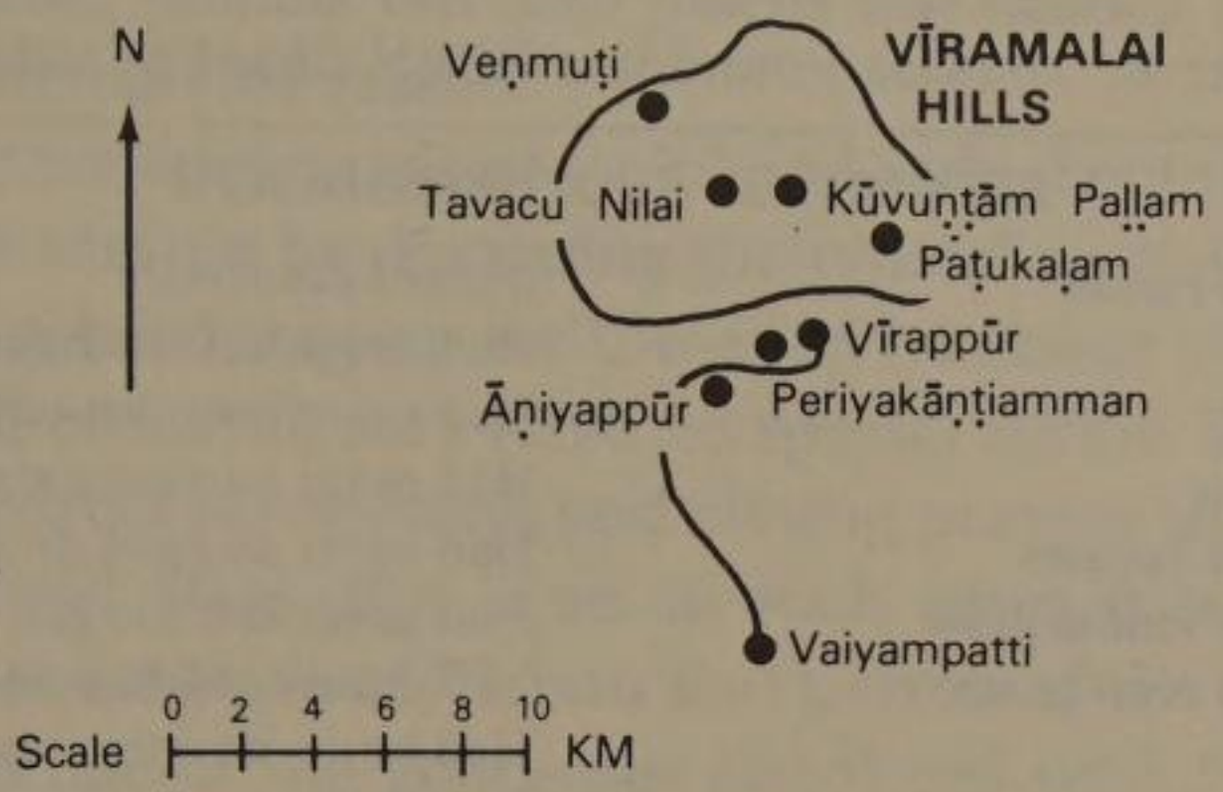
"Oh, my brothers" in a kind of invocation to their spirits. She also refers to herself over and over again as their sister. Another of her phrases, "We were born together," also emphasizes the strength of this sibling tie. If the men who become possessed and move around during a scene of battle are like brothers, then the women in the audience must help revive them. In some cases they are even asked to act out this role. This procedure is customary at the festival held each year on the actual epic battlefield, located in the Vīramalai hills.

RITUAL EVENTS AT THE HEROES' DEATH SITE

One night a year there is a procession to the Vīramalai battleground. The ceremonies take place in a rather remote spot, and the hike is long and taxing. Nonetheless, a group of young girls between the ages of ten and twelve accompany the group. At the moment when the men have reenacted the last battle and fallen on the ground, the girls must step forward. They bring along small pots of water filled with leafy twigs of margosa. While certain key verses are being sung by the bard, the girls use the wet leaves to sprinkle this magical water on the corpses. The girls' chastity gives them the special ritual power needed, just as their spiritual counterpart had the power to revive her brothers in the story.

The importance given to a chaste and powerful "sister" of the heroes is reflected in the actual wording of the ritual verses. In addition to describing the Brothers' great qualities, the chant makes repeated mention of the beauty of their young sister. She is well raised and of high class. Her body is covered with jewelry and with sweet-smelling pastes. She is noble, chaste, and as lovely as the finest birds of the forest. This pubescent sister is also highly protected. She has never been outside her own palace, and she always relies on her brothers to cope with the wider world. She also supports their activities with her magical visions and strength.

These are ideal images for a woman, parallel to those the epic provides for men. A woman may easily dream about these qualities and imagine her own life in relation to them. That is particularly the case because of the general cultural emphasis on female mourning. The sister outlives her brothers and survives to lament them. This role for the female fits a larger pattern. It is the women in this society who bear the great emotional burdens. Yet they are also the ones to



MAP 3. Ritual Sites in the Vīramalai.
The goddess Isvari first came to earth at Veṇuṭi. Tavacu Nilai is the place where the heroes' mother did her penance. Taṇkāḷ cried out for water at Kūvuṇṭām Paḷḷam while searching for her brothers. The heroes died at Paṭukaḷam, and the temple dedicated to Periyakkāṇṭiamman is one of the places where they are worshipped. For a plan of this temple, see Appendix II.

benefit from that suffering, which they can sometimes transform into great spiritual strength. Many female saints in South India, for example, have experienced enormous personal difficulties.[3] These epic rituals, then, provide a kind of window on sainthood that can touch the lives of ordinary women.

The lines of the ritual lament concerned with male suffering are brief by comparison (see Chart 8). The main image for the heroes, at their extreme moment, is not one of emotional or physical pain but of magical protection from harm. Their bodies, though bloodied, were never wounded by the enemy. Instead, their blood flows because of a purposeful fall on their own war lances. The animals know that, too, and will not go near the dead bodies. There is no question that these basic epic rituals express a deep human concern with the conquest of death. But in a more specific sense, the words of the chants link most of the suffering to females. The proceedings thereby allow a very special elevation of women.

In addition to providing a source of concrete images to which individuals can relate their own experiences, these ceremonies provide another level of imagery. I refer here to the importance of the goddess, and to the fact that the Brothers are seen as her servants, working for a larger end. This story not only surrounds individual

CHART 8. Images Found in a Ritual Chant (Version F)

BEFORE THE BROTHERS' DEATH

Sister's beauty and status
Noble woman
Virgin girl
Peacocklike woman
Wrists wearing gold bangles
Body covered with sandal paste
Body covered with civet paste
Called a lotus
Like a parrot
Like a deer
Wearing flowers
Well-raised woman
Chaste woman

Sister's innocence
Had never left the house
Had never been beyond the door
Had never crossed a street
Had never stepped on dirt
Had never left the grinding stone
(for the outside world)
Had never seen the country
Had never seen a shipping area
Had never seen a potter's wheel
Had never seen the army
Had never seen a flowering tree

AFTER THE BROTHERS' DEATH

Sister's grief
Woman with pearllike tears
Woman with a cascade of tears
Woman with corallike tears
A wandering deer
Cow dung smeared on her body
Scratched by forest thorns
Blisters on her body
Crying with face on the earth
Beating herself and crying
Arms raised over her head
Weeping with hair untied
A wild deer
A deer with broken horns
A cow without a calf
Lonely and desolate
A burnt tree
A rotten tree
An oil press without a base
An oil press with a broken axle
A cobra holding its hood over her head
Having a broken heart
Having a broken necklace
Having her jewels scattered on the ground
Having blisters on her breasts (from beating them to express grief)

The Brothers
Grass is their pillow
Stone is their pillow
The forest is their mattress
The Vīramalai hills are their mattress
Having thighs smeared with blood
Having laps full of blood

(yet) Having no sword wounds
Having no arrow wounds

The countryside
Rain is falling
The elephants have died
The horses have died
Crows fear to go there
Black sparrows fear to go there
Termites will not touch the (dead) bodies
Bears and tigers will not touch the (dead) bodies
Wild lions will not go near the (dead) bodies

lives with heroic models but also places the heroes' own existence within a greater divine frame.

This cosmic backdrop against which individual epic rituals are cast can best be illustrated by discussing the typical spatial layout of such proceedings. A bard singing for the entertainment of his audience, on a nonritual occasion, may have no special shrine. In that case he will simply address his opening and closing prayers to Ganesh (a son of the great god Śiva). But even in such cases it is customary to mention Saraswatī (wife of Vishnu and patron of the bards) in passing, as well as one of the goddesses associated with the story's own territory (Cellāttā, Periyakkāṇṭi). When the epic is sung at a local festival, however, it is usually performed in front of a temple dedicated to a goddess. In the case of a clan festival, where the major ancestral deity is often male, a temporary shrine dedicated to one or more goddesses is often set up facing the open space where the ritual battle will take place. In the case of a major temple complex, a shrine dedicated to a female deity will probably already occupy a prominent position and can be used for this purpose. In such layouts the heroes are portrayed as servants of the goddess.

IMPORTANCE OF THE GODDESS

The pattern of prominent goddess figures served by the epic heroes can be clearly seen in the seven temple maps in Appendix II. Examples 1 and 2 both show Periyakkāṇṭi(amman) as the central goddess and the elder hero (Ponnar or Periyaṇṇacāmi) occupying a subsidiary position (at a 90° angle), indicating his willingness to serve her. Other figures, of course, may appear in attendance as well. The key shrines in Appendix Maps 4-7 are dedicated to the Kannimār (a group of seven pubescent girls), and shrines for the elder brother are set at right angles to their images. Though Example 3 is not quite so clear, a goddess figure (Amman) clearly did play a key role there in some earlier period. In Example 7 the elder hero is absent; in his place is his younger counterpart (Cinnaṇṇacāmi). All these maps reinforce one more general cultural assumption: that divine females (just like human ones) need the service and protection of strong males.

Local female divinities generally control most life and death matters in a village. Benevolent and supportive when properly propitiated, these females can be violent and vengeful when insufficiently

respected. The annual festival in honor of a local goddess is usually linked to the specific territory she is thought to dominate. Propitiation involves various offerings, gifts, and symbolic services, including the sacrifice of male buffaloes, goats, sheep, and chickens.

Males who serve as local community leaders are regularly linked to such sacrificial events. Often they must symbolically offer their own bodies in service to the goddess, and sometimes this symbolic submission is preceded by a period of license. The climactic ritual events then emphasize the men's transformation into male guardians who will act like protective brothers. All sexual overtones must be eliminated through sacrifice. Metaphors of the female goddess as a "mother" or "sister" to her guardians take their place.[4]

This model of divine/human interaction outlines the cosmological frame within which local epic rituals are celebrated. If the human "actors," drawn from a local audience, see their lives encompassed by a larger set of heroic values, then the heroes' lives are themselves seen to be encompassed by the demands and expectations of their local goddess. Worship of the heroes at individual shrines, therefore, becomes linked to larger patterns of worship directed toward the great goddess herself.

In several versions of the Brothers story, the goddess Periyakkāṇṭi, who appears at the beginning and also at the end, is described as performing penance deep in the forest of the Vīramalai hills. Periyakkāṇṭi is similar, in outline, to many other local goddesses. 1. She is an incarnation of the great Pārvatī (Śiva's wife.) 2. She lives in an uninhabited area, not a human village. 3. Her childhood was spent with a sacred parent (in this case a five-hooded snake). 4. She began to perform her penance (and hence to obtain her special powers) at a very young age. 5. Periyakkāṇṭi is linked to a specific area (the Vīramalai). 6. She once forced several recalcitrant, disrespectful groups into worshipping her (including some potters, fishermen, and boatmen), whom she pestered and cursed repeatedly. 7. She has an asexual demeanor. Indeed, one version of the story actually refers to her as "male" in several instances. 8. Periyakkāṇṭi is served by male guardians (Karuppanan and Viramakāmuni). 9. She acts as a "guru" to a group of seven younger goddesses (younger forms of the Kannimār) who live beside her and help her.

Periyakkāṇṭi's role as a goddess, however, has little direct association with the actions of the heroes. Indeed, they do not even know about her penance in the forest. Instead the Brothers worship another female (Cellāttā), who is associated with their own family and

landholdings. Periyakkāṇṭi simply lives in the forest, waiting to be released from her penance. Eventually she is "found" there by the sister of the heroes, as she wanders through the Vīramalai forest looking for her dead brothers. At first Periyakkāṇṭi is angry at this disturbance and tries to kill the girl. But the sister enlists the help of various wild animals (black monkeys, cobras, tigers, and elephants) and her own male guardians. But each of these animals slowly recognizes the hidden divinity of the sister and refuses to attack her. Finally Periyakkāṇṭi herself discovers that she has met her match. The goddess respectfully submits to the sister and offers to help her find her brothers. Following the heroes' revival both females ascend to heaven together. The death of the heroic Brothers and their sister's search for them thus help to "free" Periyakkāṇṭi from her forest penance and to soften her prickly temper, a trait that seems linked to her former severe way of life. Other local goddesses are similarly softened or tamed through ritual animal sacrifices at their annual festivals. And, finally, the experiences of the goddess and the sister suggest the merger of these two women as one.

The suicide of the male heroes constitutes a small incident in a larger, sacred milieu. Temples have been raised at the spot (the *paṭukuḷam*) in the Vīramalai hills where they died. There the Brothers (Ponnar and Caṅkar) have their places of death marked by distinct shrines. However, their most-striking images appear astride huge pottery horses at the south end of this large sacred area. Periyakkāṇṭi is the major goddess in that complex, and the heroes are again represented as her servants. She occupies the place of honor, facing east. The Brothers, their male cousins, their sister Taṅkāḷ, the Kannimār goddesses, and even Vishnu himself[5] face in a subordinate (northerly) direction. All these characters stand ready to help her. A still more subordinate male, Mantiram Keḷitta Makāmuni, is set farther away, facing west. He can be understood as a final subordinate who serves all the members of this crowd (see Map 8, Appendix II).

The placement of these various story characters on the final battlefield provides a symbolic statement about the ultimate purpose of the lives of the heroes themselves. Their death was a kind of sacrifice to a great goddess, and hence to wider cosmic ends that no man can fully grasp. The heroes submit to this divine purpose, just as actors in local rituals submit to these supermen.

When the yearly festival takes place in the Vīramalai, there are many other events besides the reenactment of the epic's final battle scene. These additional activities focus around a major temple con-

structed in honor of Periyakkāṇṭi, just west of the town of Vīrappūr. It is located about five kilometers from the battlefield itself, in a more accessible place, allowing for attendance by much larger crowds.

FESTIVAL PROCEEDINGS

The annual Periyakkāṇṭi ceremonies begin on the day of the new moon in late February or early March (the Tamil month of Māci) and last for ten days. The timing is important, as this event coincides with an important Hindu festival called Śiva Ratiri ("Śiva's night"). The whole month is generally associated with death and then with renewal. The moon, which is dark at first and gradually grows brighter on the days that follow, emphasizes this transformation. Nothing very striking happens on the first seven days of the festival. However, a local political leader (a Jemindar) must serve in the temple as a special festival devotee during these ceremonies. On the first day he ties a special ritual thread to his wrist *(kāppu)* as a mark of his sacred and especially pure ritual condition. This man must be a Kavuṇṭar by caste. His role parallels that played by a similar community leader in many other local goddess festivals.

On the seventh night, there is a procession to the battlefield *(paṭukuḷam),* where the final death of the heroes is reenacted. On the eighth day, certain supplementary events begin. Now a new procession leaves the main temple and starts for the neighboring town of Āniyappūr. In this procession each main story figure is represented by a small brass icon. Periyakkāṇṭi, for example, is seated on her elephant vehicle. The elder brother, Ponnar, accompanies her on his horse, while the sister is carried alongside in her palanquin. And the loyal minister, Cāmpukā, follows close behind riding a bull. This last figure has no place within the temple in an icon form because of his low caste. So, he is uniquely impersonated by a living untouchable male, and the bull he rides is also a live animal. This role is an honorary one and is therefore allocated to a local leader of the untouchable caste group in question (Paṟaiyā).

Halfway to Āniyappūr the procession stops at a small shelter *(mantapam).* The two women (Periyakkāṇṭi and Taṇkāḷ) stop to rest, while the two men (Ponnar and Cāmpukā) carry on to their original destination. In Āniyappūr, Ponnar places an arrow in a banyan tree (an act performed for him by a priest). Then both Ponnar's icon and Cāmpukā

on his bull return to the women's resting place. There, far from either village, Ponnar is said to die. A local Kavuṇṭar leader performs a small funeral ceremony to mark the event. The several icons remain at the shelter through the night. Very early the next morning, however, the spirits embodied in all three images are said to depart toward heaven. The precise moment of leave-taking is marked by the sacrifice of a goat in front of one of Periyakkāṇṭi's male guardians (Mantiram Keḷitta Makāmuni). The wife of the Kavuṇṭar Jemindar simultaneously makes a few last offerings at the shelter. Later, the three icons are returned without much ceremony to the large temple.

In these events the heroic battle and subsequent death scene are again reenacted. Why is that story told twice? The answer would seem to lie in a local accommodation to various levels of popular taste. The late-night scene at the actual battlefield site is a ceremony requiring deep personal involvement with the heroes and one that makes little reference to Brahman-style rituals and procedures. The second set of ceremonies, by contrast, incorporates several features generally associated with high-class temple rituals. They include the multiple-icon procession, the shooting of a ceremonial arrow into a symbolic tree, and the more-general enactment of a mythical story by appointed priests. The last involves no spirit possession and requires no audience participation. The large crowd of visitors on pilgrimage are better served by these proceedings, which occur near a town and at a convenient time of day.

Later, Periyakkāṇṭi returns to her temple (from heaven). Then she enjoys another dramatic procession, this time being pulled around her main shrine in a large wooden cart. The local Jemindar, who has stayed in the temple as the goddess's servant through all these events, must touch the wheel of the cart before it is pulled through its circuit. This action parallels an event in the epic story itself. At one point the father of the heroes lays his head under the wheel of the local goddess's vehicle, in a gesture indicating his willingness to die to serve her. Both actions thus suggest a symbolic self-sacrifice. On the tenth day the Kannimār (seven young goddesses) are also taken around the goddess's shrine. Later Periyakkāṇṭi makes her final circuit to indicate that the festival is over. Perhaps the potential merger of these several female divinities into one goddess is ritually expressed by their repeated, alternating circumambulation of a single ritual site.

It is important to note the many forms in which males submit to and serve this local goddess. First, a local Kavuṇṭar leader ties a *kāppu* thread on his wrist and vows to remain celibate within the goddess's shrine throughout the festival period. He serves her as a devotee, but later also suggests (symbolically) that his very life may be considered a gift to her. Then there are the heroic Brothers, who sacrifice themselves on the battlefield and are seen to serve the goddess in an afterlife. Further, members of the audience indicate their willingness to submit, in turn, to the spirits of the heroes. Finally, there is the beheading of male goats, used as offerings to a subordinate pantheon. All these sacrifices are male-oriented, and they all contribute in one way or another to an ultimate expression of service to the goddess. This backdrop gives some cosmic meaning to the lives of the epic heroes themselves.

THE HEROES' UNTOUCHABLE ALLY

Another important feature of the Brothers story is the alliance the heroes have with an untouchable. As a part of the boon given the heroes at birth, an outcaste male, born at the same instant they are, is destined to become their key ally and helper. Cāmpukā (pronounced Sambhuka, as in the name for Śiva) has many of the traits of a god. He exhibits magical abilities as well as superhuman strength. His importance to the story is clearly attested by his appearance in all versions of the epic. In addition, Cāmpukā is also present at several shrines dedicated to the story's main characters (see Map 3 in Appendix II). He is also impersonated during most ritual proceedings (for example, by the living representative of this caste community who rides the bull in the Vīramalai festival).

The appearance of a low-caste drummer-assistant on the battlefield next to a dying hero is a familiar event in ancient Tamil poetry.[6] Drums were used to announce a battle and also were sounded after a key warrior fell. The strong rhythms were supposed to ward off dangerous forces that might otherwise attack his body. A similar ritual prominence is given to a great war drum in this local epic. When the Brothers decide to go to war against the Vēṭṭuva hunters, they first ask Cāmpukā to announce their raising of an army by drumming the news in each of 50 subordinate areas. In the bardic versions, however, Cāmpukā demurs, saying that the kingdom's great drum lies at the bottom of an irrigation reservoir and that

extensive rituals are required to raise it. The Brothers agree to the required ceremonies, and the bard then describes the huge quantities of food required for the ritual. In addition to many other things, two buffalo heifers are needed. Their blood is to be mixed with cooked rice and sprinkled around the edges of the irrigation tank where the drum is said to lie.

When Cāmpukā is ready to raise the drum, a vivid description of this event is supplied:

> Cāmpukā stood facing North and prayed to Vishnu. He took his great boar spear and stuck it in the earth. It descended to the world below, and the whole earth trembled. Finally the spear struck the great drum. With the sound "tumi" it rose to the surface. Cāmpukā rubbed sand on the frame to clean and polish the whole. He then set the drum on a hillock and stretched two heifer hides over it. Thinking that he would need a stick to beat the great instrument with, Cāmpukā next cut down a short palmyra palm tree. . . . When he began to beat the drum a great sound was heard. The chariot army, the elephants, the cavalry, the infantry, the guardians of the eight directions, the eight universes, and the fourteen worlds were stirred by that sound. Each shook to its very center.

In a modern, literary version of the story, this magic drum also appears at the heroes' death scene. When the younger twin commits suicide, Cāmpukā beats the great instrument over his lifeless body. Here is a picture of the fallen hero much like that in ancient Tamil poetry. Cāmpukā also throws away his huge horn to underline his ritualistic expression of grief.

Such striking gestures occur only in the most-modern and sophisticated version (L) of the Brothers story, however. They also appear in association with a most-unusual account of the heroes' death. In other versions of the story, the twins die when they fall forward across the tips of their own war lances. In this one account, however, the elder twin first spreads a red silk cloth on the ground. He then proceeds to sit on it (facing north), selecting a special yogic posture. He attaches his war shield to his chest and then simply breathes a last breath. This scene, too, evokes an ancient Tamil tradition in which warriors would face north and starve themselves to death after defeat in battle.[7] Classical poetic references have thus been skillfully blended into this new version. No similar images occur in the other versions I collected, not even in those the modern poet built on. It seems likely that these special references to ancient ritual forms have been inserted by the contemporary editor.

A basic alliance between the epic heroes and an untouchable First Minister provides a thread that runs through all variants of the story. Unlike the references to drumming for the dead or to death through yogic self-control, this theme appears to be a fundamental feature of the whole account. However, this idea cannot be considered uniquely South Indian. A recent article by Hiltebeitel,[8] points to the importance of a low-status ally in two classical Indo-European accounts. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the true hero has a permanent friend, guide, and ally in a figure linked to the forest, to tribal life, and to barbaric forms of sacred power. The two allies (Enkidu, in the case of Gilgamesh, and Sugriva, in the case of Rāma) bear an association with drums, drunkenness, possession, and some kind of aboriginal social status. Finally, in both classical legends the heroes are ultimately concerned with restoring their proper relationship with a goddess. That restoration involves some kind of great sacrifice performed by the low-status ally. Cāmpukā's spearing of the great black boar could be seen to serve a very similar function in the Brothers story. A structural feature common to at least two great epics in Indo-European tradition, then, may have seemed intuitively "right" in the local epic, sung by local bards, because of these men's familiarity with folk versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* At local goddess festivals a ritual bond betweeen Kavuṇṭars and outcaste Paṟaiyā drummers is also given great importance. That particular theme, the link of landowner-warrior and a lowly drummer, thus has parallels at other cultural levels as well.[9]

RITUAL STRUCTURE OF THE STORY

Another ritual aspect of the Brothers story is the important structural formula that shapes the heroes' own lives. The lives of their grandfather and father follow a normal pattern. In the third generation, however, the twin brothers present the listener with a surprise. Now each key expectation is contradicted in a neat pattern of reversals. Here is the life-cycle pattern in the first generation: The grandfather of the twins is a married man. Soon he is given land by the Chola king. Next he confirms his territorial rights through his victory in a contest with some local artisans. Afterwards he acquires a son. Finally, he and his wife die peacefully. These events provide a firm set of life-cycle stages:

a. Marriage
b. Establishment as a person of importance
c. Defense of that social status
d. Birth or adoption of a male heir
e. Death

As if to confirm the significance of this pattern of expectations, the story repeats the same sequence for the next generation. The son of the previous ruler also marries (a). He is then crowned by the Chola king and given a special title (b). Next, he successfully defends himself against an artisan who plots to take over his lands (c). Then his wife makes a trip to heaven to obtain male heirs (d). Finally, some years later, the couple die (e).

In the third generation there is a surprise, the significance of which builds only gradually. The twin heroes of the epic's final chapter also marry, but this time the union is incomplete. The twins never touch their wives physically. Instead the women are soon locked up in an isolated castle. Their sister never marries at all. This development can be called ~ a (not a). Next, the two heroes are never crowned or honored in any ceremony. Instead, they are insulted by a Chola king (~b). Then they are challenged by an artisan. Although the Brothers triumph temporarily in that contest, a group of artisan allies soon takes up their cause. As a result, a great magical boar attacks the heroes' rich paddy lands and destroys them. The consequence of all these events is ~ c. The heroes also have no offspring (~ d). The brilliant denouement that ends this negative sequence is ~ e: the twin heroes never really die. Instead, they are revived from a semi-death by their sister and quickly ascend to heaven to become minor divinities. There are no direct descendants.

The (natural) sequence of expectations built up by the first two generations of heroes is thus broken and systematically reversed in the third. None of the normal steps in the life-cycle of the story's central figures are completed successfully. But, by this very fact, a logic is laid for overcoming the final step in the sequence as well. The whole progression of events turns on defeating death. In so doing, the story takes on the structure of a ritual, a ritual with the power to overcome life's normal limits. This dramatic structure is present in several texts, but is most fully developed in the bardic version of the epic. That is not surprising, since it is the bardic versions that are most closely linked to local festival rituals.

THREE

Oral Performances

THE ORAL PERFORMANCE MILIEU

Many scholars have speculated about the impact of writing on human culture. What happens when a written story text is introduced into a milieu where an oral tradition of storytelling already exists? In the case of long bardic texts, the potential impact of writing is particularly great. For such long items, more than for short accounts or brief vignettes (where public competence is much more widespread), the skill of the bard is a critical ingredient. The dynamic human role in storytelling can recede rapidly when a tradition of performance gets fixed in written words. A bard will constantly mold his story production to the demands of specific audiences and settings. No matter how well he has memorized his lines, he cannot operate by rote alone. A sense of dramatic structure and of poetic expression are vital to the success of the performance. By contrast, a written text tends to separate the poet's sensitivity to word selection from the audience-interaction process. With writing, producer and interpreter become separated. An intermediate situation exists when a bard later reads or performs from his own fixed account.

The development of writing marked a critical step in human history. The written word has had such a pervasive influence on communication processes in general that it is important to try to understand its impact on the content and style of communication. There are still only a handful of studies that describe the kinds of

shifts in content and structure that the introduction of a written text demands. Similarly, those who still use oral performance techniques in teaching or in speechmaking have generally lost touch with traditional bardic models. Our oral communication skills have waned accordingly. There is a need to appreciate what is being lost through such heavy reliance on the written word, as well as to know what has been gained. Understanding what patterns are best suited to each medium can help develop a more effective use of both. To explore this question in the Indian context, let us compare two texts produced by the same bard under differing circumstances. One version was dictated; the other derives from a traditional, audience-oriented performance.

E. C. Rāmacāmi, the bard who produced these two texts (Versions B and D), learned the story as a child from his father and his elder brothers. He then studied with T. N. Karuppanan, a distant relation from Toṭṭampālaiyam, to refine his knowledge of difficult passages. Karuppanan, in his youth, studied with Nancappan, a singer from Kāncapuram, a town a few miles northwest of Kuṇṭaṭam. Nancappan, in his time, studied with Cellāṇṭi, from the town of Pūlavāṭi, east of Pollachi. All these men are of the barber caste, except Cellāṇṭi, who was a Paṇṭāram, a caste of non-Brahman priests and ritual specialists.

VERBAL ADJUSTMENTS

Rāmacāmi claimed that he told exactly the same story twice. Though he was questioned repeatedly, he was unable to describe even small differences between his two presentations. Yet he clearly responded to the request for dictation with a significantly changed style. The following are some of the more-striking adjustments he made to this novel situation (he had never tried dictation before):

1. The quantity of words used was reduced by about 70%.
2. The formulaic and poetic passages underwent greater shrinkage than did the prose narration.
3. Much descriptive detail, particularly information on the general setting, was eliminated.
4. Extraverbal information contained in pitch, in drum rhythms, in pauses, etc., was lost.
5. A certain amount of meter was added to individual song lines in order to compensate for the loss of the drum rhythms that would normally have accompanied these passages.

6. There was more variation in the meters used, and some added matching of these to individual themes.
7. Responses from an assistant bard, and grunts, coughs, etc., from the audience, were eliminated.
8. Much humor was eliminated.
9. The use of short passages, summarizing actions described in song-poems, was cut dramatically.
10. Nonsense syllable lines, which mainly serve to set up a new rhythm before introducing the next song, were eliminated.
11. The order of presentation was changed; a general overview of the action was placed before mood-setting descriptions.
12. The birth order of two siblings was inverted, in order to make a male older than his sister. This reduced the potential humor in certain scenes in which they interact.

All these changes made the dictated text more concise. Many of them also served to compensate for the loss of nonverbal cue material so important in oral performances. The dictated text became more linear in form. Action sequences received added attention, while mood-creating devices lost ground. The bard also laid a new stress on prose narrative sections within the whole. These changes are bound to affect the story's total impact.

Rāmacāmi had never had an occasion to write his story down. Indeed, he did not have the skills to do so, yet he seemed to have an intuitive grasp of what writing was like. He sensed that some efficiency of word use was needed and that he should not ask a scribe to write out repetitive phrases unnecessarily. That was his own assessment of the situation, as I repeatedly insisted that he recite his story exactly as he normally performed it.

The total reduction in wordage for Rāmacāmi's dictated version was about 70%. Perhaps 15% of that total consists of his elimination of comments or repeated phrases that would normally be added by his assistant (for the dictation Rāmacāmi worked alone). But other means of shortening the text version account for the bulk of the reduction. In particular, the song and prose passages were differentially trimmed down. Rāmacāmi shortened his more-poetic and formulaic songs almost twice as much as he cut his spoken, narrative segments. His songs constitute about 30% of the original material (as measured by time elapsed on tape) and only about 18% of the total wordage of the dictated account.

The performed text of the first song ran 36 lines, the dictated version only 13. Most of the reduction was accomplished by omitting repeated phrases and by discarding filler words. These changes subtract little from the content of the text. Seventy-five phrases are repeated in the first version as opposed to only five in the second. And out of 59 filler words (*aṅke, aṅku,* and *ini*) only one remains in the dictated version.

Rāmacāmi also dropped the following important phrases in his dictated text:

(The king is a) golden mother
(The king is) my mother
(He rules) with the gods
(In the country) of abundance
In the Country Where the Kāveri Flows
The good king in a fine palace
(The king) rules alone

These omissions do not substantially alter the meaning or general mood of the larger song, as can be seen from the translation of the dictated variant, but they do reduce the expressiveness embedded in its details. Perhaps they also reduce the song's ritual or invocational impact. Seeing the two texts side by side points up how difficult it would be to read the performed variant in full. Extensive repetitions and an ample use of filler words produce a grammatical jumble for the eye, even if one studies the Tamil original. When rhythm, melody, and an expressive voice are added, however, the same words make a lovely song.

FORMULAIC STRUCTURE

In the live performance the bard's song came in two segments separated by a short prose passage. In the dictated version they are joined and their order of presentation is reversed (lines *h* - *m* appear before *a* - *g*). Though this song has a more or less fixed corpus of lines, it has no fixed sequence. The ordering of both whole and part lines has been changed by the bard. Some word orders were also inverted, and a few repetitions were inserted. Such songs are thus made up of clusters of traditional lines, and the bard has the freedom to add and delete as he pleases.

Is it possible, therefore, to call such song passages formulaic? Basgöz has recently suggested a very helpful approach to the study of

formula, stemming from his work on Turkish prose epics.[1] He describes the repeated phrase as an aesthetic device, one that helps embellish the text more than it advances specific action sequences. Basgöz has found that great tellers use more formulas than do lesser tellers, and that they use them in more-complex ways. He has found, too, that a responsive audience tends to encourage a performer to use more formulas, and that dictation generally results in using fewer.

The most-important aspect of the formula, according to Basgöz, is the thought or idea embedded in it. Formulas, he says, deal with emotion. They provide a way of heightening the bard's expression of poetic feeling. Formulas also help to poeticize the commonplace events of a story. For example, these standardized phrases often describe a hero and a heroine, a series of farewells, or a great battle. In studying the Turkish hikaye (prose epic), Basgöz finds that such devices are sometimes recognizable because of their frequent repetition, but that is by no means the only key to a formula's presence. He also finds that music and metrics are not the key features of prose formula, though they are important. Basgöz suggests, instead, that one must classify formulaic passages on the basis of the central ideas they express. Sometimes the personages, objects, or occasions found in association with their use must be listed as well.

Basgöz's definition fits Rāmacāmi's songs quite well. Similar formulaic clusters decorate his larger prose accounts. In the text cited above the key idea is that "a just and authoritative ruler makes for a prosperous kingdom." When such songs are interspersed in the bard's larger prose text, they help set the mood for given events. They also mark points of change in action sequences and in the epic's larger time framework. Not all of Rāmacāmi's songs, however, are equally fixed in their use of imagery or specific phrasing. The degree of his poetic license varies with the topic he treats and the total time he allocates to it (see Chart 9). Songs of average or greater than average length appear to vary a "medium" amount. His very short songs, however, were either quite standardized or very free in their form. Those exhibiting the most variety were short and used very frequently. Such variety seems to serve the special purpose of preventing monotony.

Oinas has further identified eight topical settings where formulas are often used.[2] Many of the categories he identifies, such as descriptions of weapons and of military attire, are of equal importance in

CHART 9. Major Songs in the Dictated Text (Version D)

Theme	Sub-category	Typical length	Number of occurrences	Amount of variation
Description of the ruler and/or the country	The story of what happened	Long	11	Medium
	A fine, prosperous country	Long	25	Medium
	Good times and a just rule	Long	21	Medium
Description of a god or great person	Description of Vishnu (a god)	Long	35	Medium
	Description of Cellāttā (a goddess)	Short	4	Little
	Description of a king	Short	6	Little
Description of travel on foot	Description of an arrival	Short	24	Much
	Description of a departure	Short	36	Much
	Description of walking	Long	8	Medium
Description of travel in/on a conveyance	On horseback	Long	12	Medium
	On a swing	Long	10	Medium
	On a palanquin	Short	4	Little
Description of violence	With a knife/whip/sword	Long	14	Medium

terms of their formulaic treatment in the present story. However, other topics that Oinas lists are absent form the Brothers story and some he does not mention are present. For example, in this local Indian tradition, the bards do not present their own ideas using asides. In a further difference from Oinas's materials, the feelings of an Indian hero are rarely described with formulas, though the feelings of an Indian heroine often are. Here moods of sadness and self-doubt are often the subject of formulas, while moods of elation and of happiness are usually expressed more directly by actions.

A formula, in the sense that Oinas uses it, resembles what Olrik has called a "tableau scene,"[3] a specific stereotyped event with which a poet creates a kind of photo image before the mind's eye. Olrik says that these tableaux have special power. If Oinas stresses the verbal aspect of formula, Olrik focuses on their visual or spatial qualities. In both perspectives, there is a concept of metanym. In the formula some key actor or element of a scene is described by association with

a second factor. As Olrik says, furthermore, some sense of special intimacy must be conveyed through this linkage. A man who runs like a certain horse is portrayed as having an affinity with that horse, or a woman walking like a swan somehow shares the swan's magic. In Olrik's discussion of tableaux this idea is carred further: Either the human or the animal is seen doing something to the other half of the pair. A human protagonist might ride a bull, nurse a swan, or touch a corpse; a dragon may breathe on a protagonist, or a serpent may rock his boat. Olrik's tableaux scenes, then, contain associations of characters and animal counterparts in an active interchange.

In the Brothers story, however, many formulas describe interactions between two human beings. A hero is described bowing before a king, or a female servant offers food to a guest. Where feelings are described the usual choice is a passive, metaphorical comparison. A bereaved heroine is said to be a rotting tree, a broken oil press, or a cow without its calf. Just as in Olrik's tableaux, all these formulas play on a special sense of object intimacy or magical sharing. The king and the guest, in the examples given above, are both involved in ritual behaviors. These moments are sacred. This sense of divine interludes gives many formulaic descriptions a ritualistic, powerful tone. Even when the protagonist is not mentioned (as in the formula "at the time of the sun's greatest height") there may be an association with a sacred setting. In crossing from tableau scenes to short, standardized formulaic phrases, then, one traverses a wide middle ground where magical and ordinary time, or magical and ordinary place, interact.

In a hikaye prose narration, Basgöz found 47 of these set phrasings embedded in 1,664 lines of text, amounting to a little under 3% of the whole. This proportion is far lower, of course, than the 30% represented by Rāmacāmi's songs in a live performance. But if one searches for formulas in the prose portions of the performed version, only 2% or 3% of the material can be so classified.[4] Many prose formulas are quite short, and they are generally addressed to personages of higher or lower status than that of the speaker. That is, prose formulas are used most in formal interaction settings. Other lines simply contain standardized poetic descriptions of specific personages or scenes. Here are some typical examples from a superior to an inferior:

Oh people, there is no death for those who take refuge in me!
Oh kings, protected ones, there is no time to spare!
Oh servant wearing a badge!

from an inferior to a superior:

Oh Lord, king!

a comment on fate:

One can wipe off black soot, one can cross the Kāveri River, but even Brahmā can not rewrite fate. The creator who wrote (then) does not rewrite (now).

a description of an action:

The king lifted the child in his great hand and dried its jewel-like face.

a description of a time of day:

At the time of the sun's greatest height, they gathered at the Ganesh temple, at midday.

a description of a personage:

The king, the precious king, the one like summer thunder, the worthy one of few words.

a narrator's comment:

Oh child don't cry, be healthy, don't pine.

calling on a god:

Oh God, one who carries a conch and a discus and lives in Vaikunta!

These short prose formulas must take second place to songs in terms of their overall expressiveness, yet they do seem to serve a similar purpose. As Basgöz has also observed, such formulas decorate and punctuate a prose narration. Unlike Lord's description of the Yugoslavian bard's use of the formula as a compositional device, here such lines generally have magical, sacred, and/or aesthetic functions.

There has been very little research on the distribution of formulas in the Tamil folk corpus, let alone on correspondences that can be

observed across the many languages spoken in India. Nonetheless, we do know that in longer works most Hindu bards open with a poem in praise of Ganesh, the god to whom one should turn for blessings at the start of any new undertaking. That first praise-poem is usually followed by a second addressed to Saraswatī, the goddess of music and learning. Similarly, the final verses of a long story generally provide a blessing for the bard's audience, wishing the listeners long life and prosperity.

Even in this highly stereotyped context of introductory and concluding remarks, Rāmacāmi handled his two versions differently. In the performance he devoted only five lines to Ganesh and five to Saraswatī. He then moved on to salute all the gods in heaven and sing a 25-line praise-poem for the most beloved of all gods, Murugan.[5] In the dictated version, Rāmacāmi added seven extra lines to his Saraswatī song and omitted any special praise of Murugan. In the performed version, he repeated several of the words of the first poem, pronouncing them in a fashion that blurred and altered several of the syllables. In that context their ritual presentation was sufficient, while in dictation he took care to pronounce his words clearly so that their meaning could be grasped and correctly recorded.

In both cases the introductory poems the bard chose were widely known. Indeed, the first song he used was the one the poet Villiputtūr Ālvār used to open his famous Tamil version of the *Mahābhārata*. The second verse the local bard chose was similarly venerable. It has been attributed to Kambar, another great Tamil poet, who is author of the best-loved regional variant of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The local bard knew the wording of these verses, but he glossed over them lightly for his village audience. By contrast, at the end of the epic, a ritual poem (mangalā) addressed to Rāmā is quite long in the performed version but is trimmed to a bare minimum in the dictated text. A mangalā serves as a sign of communal worship and is used to end a live performance, but it is too repetitive to make interesting reading. In the performance the bard devoted only one sentence to wishing his audience a long life, but in the dictated version he recited a full poem. The words he used were those commonly employed in printed folk texts. He had known these poems earlier, but he brought them out just for his dictation, not in performance. Only in the context of dictation did he seem to imagine a (future) audience that might appreciate these literary overtones.

FURTHER COMPARISONS OF DICTATION AND PERFORMANCE

All the versions of the *Mahābhārata* contain blessings for listeners or readers. The literary variants list a rather abstract set of benefits, particularly the relief from sin. A promise of receiving regular funeral oblations after death is also common. In Tamil folk tradition, by contrast, equally poetic but more-concrete formulas employ standard lines referring to more-tangible pleasures. Here is the passage Rāmacāmi used to conclude his dictation of the Brothers story:

> Those who read the story of the farmer Kunnuṭaiyā Kavuṇṭar
> Those who teach it, and those who hear it
> Let them be eternal, like the golden hall (at Chidambaram)
> Like the god's counsel chamber itself.
> Whatever the country and the time, let them reign:
> Like an undiminishing milk well,
> Like a little river that never dries up,
> Like a banyan tree that grows and multiplies itself,
> They shall be firm like the well-rooted aruku grass
> And their relatives shall prosper and surround them,
> Like clumps of bamboo.

The descriptive detail provided by Rāmacāmi in his live performances is even more extensive and more vivid than that contained in his dictated acount. For example, instead of simply stating that a hero has just survived a famine, in performance the bard tells his audience what that famine felt like. One now learns that the suffering lasted for twelve years, that people saw mirages, and that the roots of local plants had withered with the heat. Such details give the oral performance an extra richness. On the other hand, the dictated version gets to the key events of the story faster. It tells one just as much or more about what happened, but less about how things looked and felt.

Near the beginning of the Brothers story the god Vishnu sets up a contest. The struggle will pit the farmer-heroes against a group of artisan rivals. The bard, enjoying an opportunity to elaborate, told his audience how the contestants were dressed, just how they seated themselves, and how long the confrontation lasted. After the farmers win, he provided further details on the agreement between the two parties, and mentioned the fact that the artisans upheld their right to claim a living from the victors. One also learned the motivations

behind the heroes' actions, that the eldest brother kept his new employment a secret from his wider family, and that the heroes' grandparents were cross cousins. All these details helped place later events (a cousin's marriage and a family feud) in clear perspective. The same events are described in the dictated text, too, but with all the above details omitted.

At the same time, the dictated text makes easier reading. Its more condensed prose allows the underlying logic of various action sequences to come through. In a scene in which Śiva and Vishnu bargain over their relative powers, Śiva takes away several of Vishnu's magical objects. In return he grants Vishnu's request that the twin heroes be allowed to spend sixteen years on earth. In the live performance the conversational and colloquial tone is further heightened by "mm" inserts provided by an assistant (the speaker is Śiva):

"Gopāla!"
mm
"You are to go in one (different) direction daily."
mm
"You may bring a woman (to me) daily, if she places a leaf full of food and two curries before you."
mm
"You are to stay with the twins for sixteen years. After that, bring their lives to the god's council chamber in heaven and reentrust them to me. Then you may take back your right-spiraled conch and shepherd's box."
mm
"(Until then) pawn these with me."

The dictated passage conveys slightly less information but makes the logic of the whole situation clearer. Though still conversational in tone, it lacks the back-and-forth pattern of the performed text. The sentence constructions are also slightly more formal:

> "O.K. Vishnu! You have been bringing someone or other from earth daily to burn me and cause me trouble. Therefore, pawn here (with me) your right-spiraled conch and your shepherd's box until Tāmarai's children reach the age of sixteen and you bring me back their lives."

RHYTHM, METER, AND TEMPO

There has been extensive discussion among students of the folk epic in recent years as to how bards manage to remember long

stories, and how they manage to retell them so skillfully. Milman Parry, working on a corpus of Yugoslavian oral texts collected in the 1920s, first suggested that oral epics are not memorized line for line. He tried to show how such stories can be constructed afresh by a singer from a large corpus of formulaic stanzas that have been learned over a long period. That helped explain how a bard could sing in perfectly metered verse for hours at a time without a strictly memorized text. Albert Lord, refining Parry's observations, tried to show how a bard works with half lines and even shorter phrases, skillfully substituting and shuffling such small pieces within a larger metrical mold.

The bards who perform for entertainment in the area of South India where the Brothers story is most popular do not produce perfectly metered prose. Indeed, even the song portions of a live performance did not have meter embedded in the words themselves. Instead, a rhythm was provided when the bard "stretched" or "compacted" those words to fit particular drum beats. However, these bards do operate from a base set of familiar lines. Just as Parry and Lord predicted, Rāmacāmi used essentially the same song lines in both versions. Yet he continually shifted whole and even part phrases around, using a different sequence of these pieces on the two occasions.

In the prose passages Rāmacāmi made the freest use of words. There one can only compare whole scenes. In describing events, it seems that this singer worked from a standardized corpus of mental images rather than from a body of set lines. The general character of individual scenes remains constant between versions, but the words used to describe them change. Events can be noticeably "stretched" or "contracted" to fit the demands of a particular performance, just as the words and phrases are so treated to fit the demands of each musical rhythm.

The bard's recall of epic events, by way of scenes fixed in the imagination, cannot be passed over lightly. The visual texture of Rāmacāmi's performed versions is striking. The great difference between this account and all others is the bard's ability to paint pictures before the eyes of his village audiences. Rāmacāmi's small facial and hand movements contribute to this effect, as do the typically soft lamp light and the deep shadows that accompany his performances. But the rhythms and musical tones of the songs, as well as the timing and the tones in the bard's voice, are also important. During his

performances, vivid scenes appear before the mind's eye. This synesthesia, or movement, from mainly oral stimuli to mainly visual output, is greatly reduced when the story is read.

In Rajasthan, in another tradition, the bards use a canvas mural to depict epic events described in their oral performances. There the formulaic composition of each scene allows the same material to be used at many different points in the story.[6] A similar function is served by the formulaic songs used in the Brothers story. Here it is the musical refrains that provide a scenic backdrop and they, too, are used many times over with small variations. The same song can appear at several points widely separated by mood as well as by larger events. It seems significant that scholars report the Rajasthani epic to be textually more or less fixed. It has an underlying linear sequence of words that become memorized as a deep structure. Small surface changes are then worked on that frame.[7] The visual component of each retelling is also relatively fixed because of the murals. In the Brothers story, by contrast, visual and semantic stability are achieved through the merger of these two domains in formulaic song texts.

Though I interviewed several bards, none could explain just how his own recall mechanism worked. That is not surprising. But from my extensive interaction with these men, I am confident that their story memories are organized into rich bundles of multisensory associations. Each bundle contains musical sounds, rhythms, words, and visual representations. All these are stored together in the singer's mind. Each bundle is evocative. Each is full of mood and associated details of action and setting. An experienced bard can expand or contract his use of such bundles at will, responding to audience attentiveness, the amount of time available, and many other factors. In sum, Tamil folk bards like Rāmacāmi are visual, as well as musical, artists.[8]

Manipulation of rhythm is one of Rāmacāmi's many talents. For example, in the first lines of "A Just Reign and a Prosperous Kingdom" this bard has used different metrical structures in versions sung at different places in the story. When the words are set to a particular song rhythm, the natural spoken pattern is altered to make them fit the musical frame. Hence, the actual segmentation of the whole is rather different from what one would naively expect. Some words (such as *paṭṭo*) are very considerably lengthened, while others (like the first *aḷukirār*) are segmented in a novel way (see Chart 10). These changes create a set of subtle tensions between the way one is accus-

2 bars, or 8 beats

A	celuttippaṭ ṭō	nāṭṭilē	ālukirār ini	āḷukirār	
B	celuttippaṭṭō	nāṭṭilē	ālukirār ini	āḷukirār	
C	celuttippaṭṭam			ā ḷukirār	
A (cont.)	a ṭa cēṅkō	r ū nalla	ati kā rō ini	ati kā r ō	
B (cont.)	aṭa cēṅkōrū	nalla	atikārō	atikārō	
C (cont.)	ceṅkōru		atikāram		rācar

A Line, as sung, with musical lengthening indicated.
B As transcribed from performance tape.
C As it appears in the dictated text.

CHART 10. Stretching Words to Make Them Fit a Song Rhythm

tomed to hearing these words in speech and the way they are sounded in order to fit the song. The result is a series of appealing counterrhythms, some heard and others brought to the text by the listener. This is also the case with most music and poetry.[9]

In the dictated version of Rāmacāmi's story, the average number of feet per line is reduced from eight to four, mainly by leaving out filler material (*nāṭṭilē, ini, aṭa,* and *nalla*) and omitting repeats (*āḷukirār* and *atikāram*). The regularity of the meter is also improved considerably. Many lines of the performed text occupy more than eight bars of music, though some are shorter. The dictated text is metrically much more "even." It also tends to alternate trochaic (— ∪) and iambic (∪ —) feet at the ends of lines, a pattern that is absent in the live performance. Line 4 of the dictation constitutes the only exception to this rule. Although not perfect prosody, that version came much closer to having a regular meter embedded in its words than did the live performance.

These contrasts can be generalized. The dictated text has a regularity in and of itself. The performed text, when studied in isolation from its musical accompaniment, has practically none. These differences become quite impressive when one remembers that Rāmacāmi had never before dictated a text. He had learned and used these songs only in the context of a direct musical performance. Clearly, this singer had an intuitive sense of the need to regularize word groupings when his text was suddenly to be preserved in isolation from its customary melodic and rhythmic backdrop. Apparently, this

increase in internal metrical regularity was his way of compensating for the loss of habitual external regulating devices. It is amazing how skillfully and consistently Rāmacāmi was able to make this shift, in view of his lack of experience with the new medium. This surprising feat reveals the extent of poetic intuition a skilled, yet functionally illiterate, bard can call upon. It also indicates the importance of rhythm as a dramatic performance tool.

Chart 11 summarizes similar finding across a much larger sample of songs. Remarkably, Rāmacāmi was further able to alter the rhythm of his text in accordance with the type of song he dictated. Some topics were handled with two-foot lines, others by three- or four-foot rhythms. The most interesting finding of all was his changing a two-foot rhythm to an alternating two-three rhythm in a lullaby, a change that parallels the use of that lullaby. When it is sung by a mother to her child, the rhythm is regular. But when it is played "backward" through a large horn, as a joke at the enemy's expense, the usage is comical, and a two-three pattern is employed.

A second example of the bard's skillful manipulation of meter in his dictation occurs in a very sad song. While most of the dirges in this epic have a regular four-foot structure, a song sung by a child

CHART 11. Song Meters Used in the Dictated Text (no musical accompaniment)

Type of song	Number of examples examined	Feet per line	Alliteration	Rhyme	Repeat half lines	Use of extra words
Lullaby	2	2 (alternating 2/3 for the one played on a horn)	✓	✓ (at expense of word accuracy)	✓	✓
Travel song	many	3	✓	X	✓	✓
Praise of gods	many	2	✓	X	X	X
Praise of country	several	4	✓	X	X	X
Lamentation	3	4	✓	X	✓	X
Proverb	2	2 × 2 or 4 × 2 (couplets)	✓	✓	✓	X

about his parents' death is highly irregular. Here the bard finds a subtle way to convey the fact that the child is too young to know the proper poetic forms. The orphan's stumbling helps highlight his pitable condition.

Many of the songs, in both the performed and the dictated versions, contain patterns of alliteration. Alliteration at the beginnings of lines is a common feature of Tamil verses. But in the case of lullabies, Rāmacāmi used end rhymes, often even at the expense of the grammar. Unlike the other patterns described, this feature carries over from the performed to the dictated text. The grammatical irregularities lend a childlike quality to the lullabies. Probably that is why the bard allowed their presence, even in his dictated text. But where similar irregularities are present in other songs in his performance, he has carefully eliminated them from his dictated variant.

A Dictated Lullaby

Actual verse	Same verse, grammatically corrected
tāmaraiyaḷ peṟṟeṭut(tō)	tāmaraiyaḷ peṟṟeṭut(ta)
taṭṭiyarē nittirai(pō)	taṭṭiya(n)e nittiraipō
kunnuṭaiyan peṟṟeṭut(tō)	kunnuṭaiyān peṟṟeṭut(ta)
kuncaramē nittirai(pō)	kuncaramē nittiraipō

~ alliteration
◯ rhyme
( ) grammatical correction

The local singers use the uṭukkai (a small hand drum) and a pair of finger cymbals. These musical aids are central to their storytelling techniques. The body of the uṭukkai is usually made of wood,[10] though it may also be made of brass. One end of the drum is covered with the skin of a hare, and the other with the skin of a goat. The uṭukkai is always held in the left hand and played with the right index and ring fingers. The drummer strikes the goat skin end only. A hair from a horse's tail is stretched tightly across the opposite end. It vibrates in sympathy with the impact of the player's hand, producing a distinctive twang. The gods Śiva and Pārvatī are both said to dance to the sound of the uṭukkai and to be skilled at playing it. The uṭukkai is also closely associated with the worship of the seven Kannimār goddesses. It is commonly seen at the clan festivals of a select group of castes,[11] and it is also used in exorcism rituals.

A cord running criss-cross over the thin central waist of the uṭukkai holds taut the leather covering the two ends of the drum. Tonal variation is produced by squeezing a band strapped across these lacings. When the cord is grasped firmly, it increases the tension on the leather end pieces and raises the pitch. Additional variation is achieved by changing the place on the drum face where the finger strikes (the closer to the edge the higher the pitch), and also the fingers that are used. When played by local bards, this drum produces only three basic tones, which form patterns that differ for each rhythm. The effect resembles one that Yugoslavian epic singers achieve with the gusle, a stringed instrument, which is also made to sound out three tones in regular, rhythmic patterns.[12]

The uṭukkai is usually accompanied by the jālarā, a pair of finger cymbals commonly played by the lead singer. The jālarā are about two inches in diameter and made of bell metal. One is fastened to the thumb and one to the forefinger by small pieces of cord that pass through a perforation at the center of each cymbal. The cymbals produce a simple, constant rhythm that offsets the deeper and more-complex patterns of the drum. Their sound is sharp and metallic, while the tone of the drum is sonorous and rich with overtones.

The uṭukkai and jālarā are played together, often producing a syncopated effect. Chart 12 shows some examples of the patterns used. Rhythm 1 is quite complex: the cymbals play in 4/4 time, while the drum is beaten in 3/4. The two instruments sound at the same time only once in each measure. Rhythm 2 is simpler. Here the beats coincide twice in each measure. In Rhythm 3 they sound in unison three times within the measure.

In a small ancillary study of the uṭukkai, I asked Periyacāmi Uṭaiyār, a local drummer, to reproduce every rhythm he normally used, without accompanying songs, for my tape recorder. He was not the same drummer who accompanied the bard in the live performance. This basic set of performance rhythms was later analyzed by an ethnomusicologist,[13] who found that they could be reduced to the six basic patterns shown in Chart 13. Three others the bard provided were repeats, including one repeat set at a different tempo.

Next, 55 songs from the larger performance corpus were transcribed. Since this selection was made from widely varied parts of a 44-hour tape, these songs are probably representative of the total repertoire. Only three of the six drum rhythms supplied by Periyacāmi Uṭaiyār were used in these epic songs. The other three rhythms

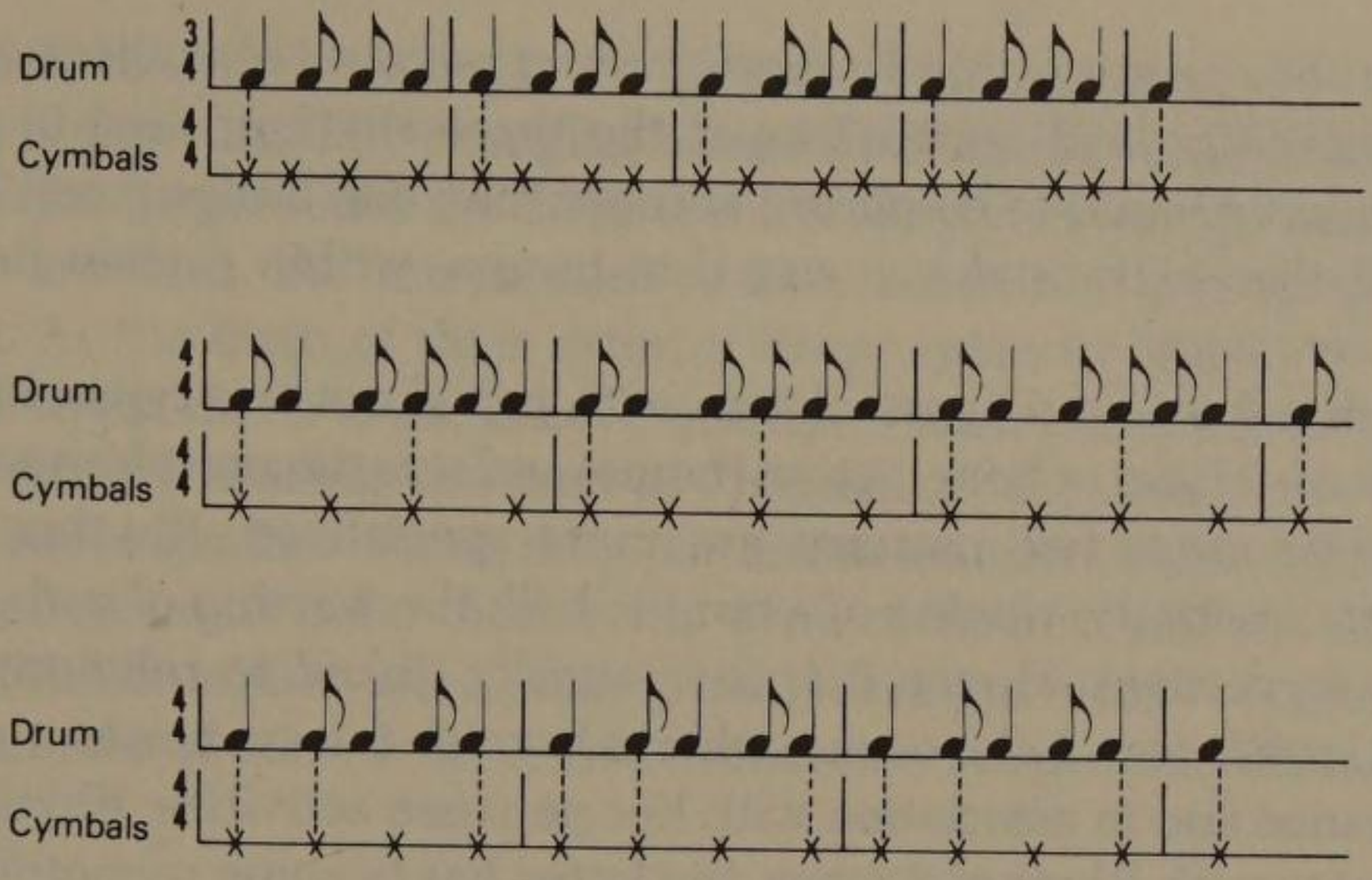


CHART 12. Syncopated Effects Produced by Drum and Finger Cymbals

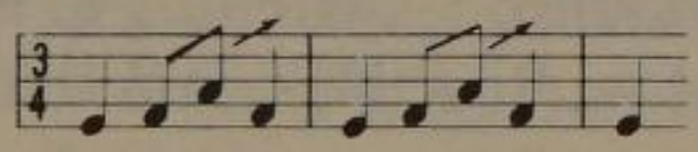
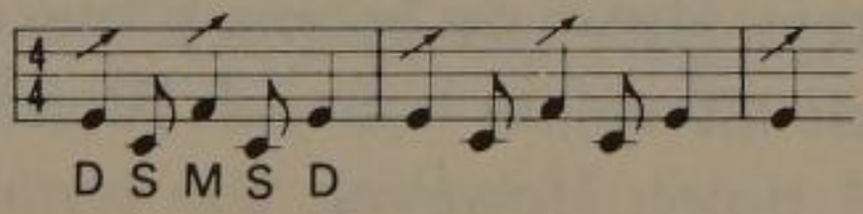
Rhythm	Number of ♩ per minute	
1	240	
2	152	
3	216, 232	 D S M S D
4	74	
5	84	
6	140	

CHART 13. Periyacāmi Uṭaiyār's Drum Rhythms Written Out to Show Tones

are part of a larger musical repertoire and are used elsewhere, such as in exorcising evil spirits. Two of the three rhythms used in epic singing were found to be played at more than one tempo (see Chart 14). All the rhythms also changed in tempo, within certain limits, between songs.

Rhythm 3 is found in association with just about any type of song (except a worship or benediction theme) and was the most frequently used. The other two patterns are more specialized. Rhythm 2 is associated with the ringing of a temple bell, the worship of gods, and final benedictions. Hence it is thematically linked to religiosity or devotion. Rhythm 2 also occurs when a heroine is traveling to a place of penance and in association with her penance activities. Rhythm 1 alternates with Rhythm 2 when the latter has become monotonous.

More generally, however, fixed rhythms do not seem to accompany fixed topics. Instead, in longer sequences of songs there is a tendency for the bard to play three or four songs in one rhythm and then to switch to another. Such switching patterns appear with regularity, no matter what topical changes may have occurred in the meantime. When a heroine's seven deaths on the penance post threaten monotony, for example, the bard allays the boredom by starting with Rhythm 3, switching to Rhythm 1, returning to 3, trying Rhythm 2, and ending the scene with Rhythm 3.

The bard also achieves variety by using several variants of one rhythm. In a song describing the worship of a god, for example, a variant introduced halfway through helps break up a larger pattern into several distinct subsegments. Other songs, within the space of a single text, alternate between two different rhythms. A lullaby in the sample alternates between Rhythm 1 (in 3/4 time) and Rhythm 2 (in 4/4 time). However, the tempo of the cymbals, set at 192,

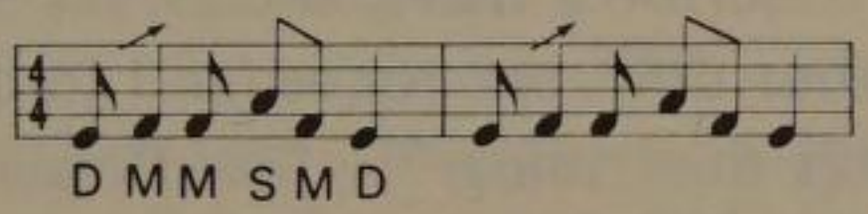
Rhythm	Number of ♩ per minute	Number of occurrences
1	160-176	5½
2	152-172, 176-192	10, 2½
3	232-240, 252-264	20, 17

CHART 14. Rhythms Used in Version B of the Epic
Based on a sample of 55 songs. ½ indicates a switch in rhythm in the middle of a song.

remains the same throughout. The musical context of the bard's songs is also varied by changing tempos. For example, the song that immediately precedes the birth of the heroes is set at 252. When the twins are born, the tempo rises to 264, indicating a climactic moment. At the birth of their sister, it drops again to 252.

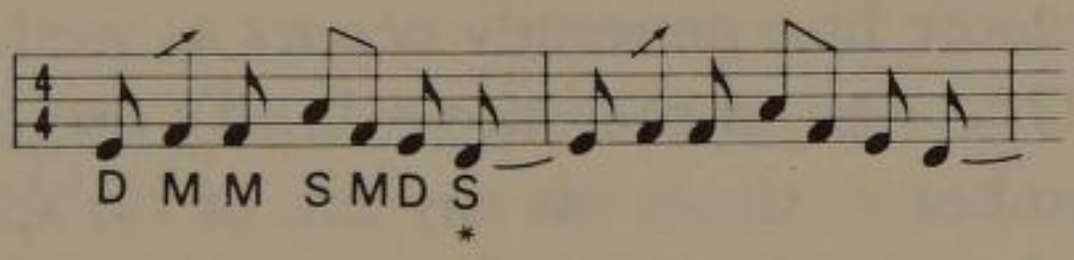
Still more subtle is the elusive quality of some of the rhythm variants. At first hearing, the bars or "phrasings" seem to pattern one way, but at another sitting they pattern in another. These variations depend on subtle differences in the stress of the beat and on whether or not the drummer uses a pick-up beat for momentum.[14] Sometimes the number of notes is decreased or increased to provide still further

Rhythm 2, basic pattern



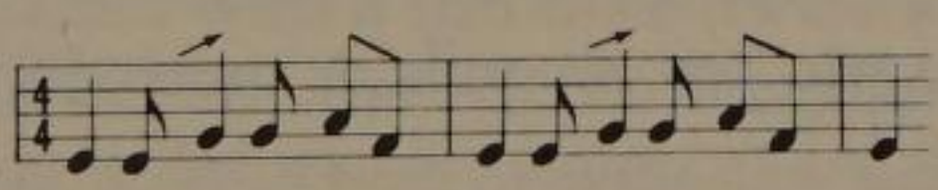
Variant a

Variant b, with optional pick-up for momentum (*)

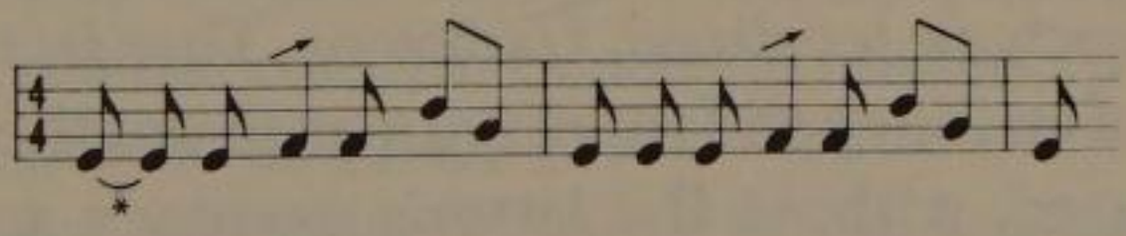


Variant c, used to inject energy into a song

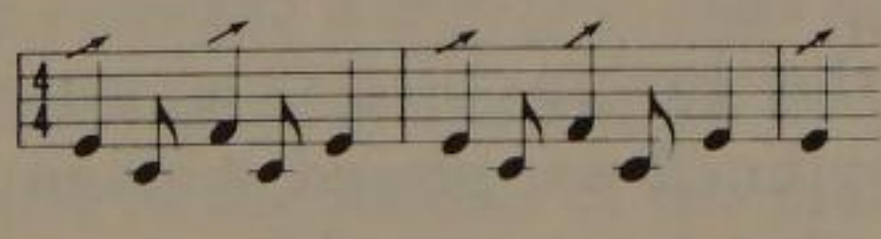
Variant d, alternate rendering of the measures



Variant e, with first note broken into halves (*)



Rhythm 3, basic pattern



Variant a

CHART 15. Rhythms and Their Variants

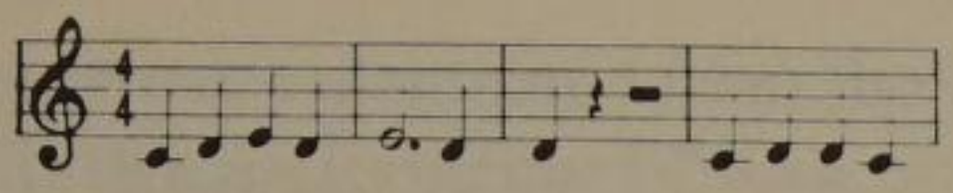
variety. All in all, these rhythmic patterns help hold the listener's attention and provide entertainment when interest in the bard's words has lapsed.

TUNES

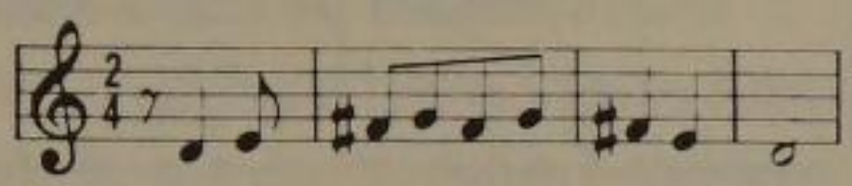
The melodies used by the bard are equally complex. A number of tunes, or perhaps tune fragments, are involved, a few of which have been identified (Chart 16). Short formulaic passages of four to six lines, in particular, can be linked to distinctive patterns. Similar topics, when treated with different wordings, however, may be set to quite different melodies. Two songs that used almost identical words to describe a travel scene, for example, were found to be set to altogether different tunes (and to different rhythms). Two of the three songs describing "A Just Reign and a Prosperous Kingdom" have identical rhythm and tune, while a third keeps the same rhythm but uses a different melody. Most common is the use of several melodic fragments in alternation within one rhythmic format. When a change of rhythm is finally introduced, however, a further change in melodic line generally occurs as well.

One way to measure a bard's use of such variety is to count the number of times his rhythm or his speed changed. In the 55 songs in the sample, it was found that the shorter the time between songs the less the likelihood that the rhythm or the tempo would change in introducing the next song. When the gap between songs was one second or less, there was a shift of tempo in 36% of the cases. When the gap was ten seconds or more, 92% of the cases showed such a change.[15]

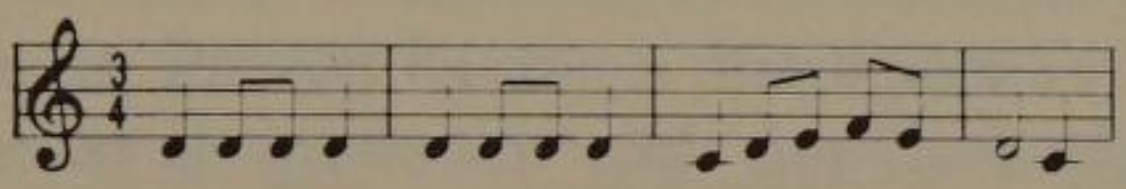
These complex rhythms appear to be part of generally known, but perhaps localized, traditions. That fact was made clear by the ability of an independent drummer to use the same patterns as the bard had used, without the latter's presence and without a song accompaniment. The main difference between the rhythms obtained in isolation and the rhythms used in an actual performance was in tempo. While Rhythm 2 was played at about the same speed on both occasions, Rhythm 1 was played faster and Rhythm 3 slower in isolation. If all this variation were in one direction one could conclude that different drummers simply tend to drum at different speeds. With the present information, however, it is more reasonable to assume that a drummer isolated from a singer has trouble setting the "right"



Just rule



All is good; fine times



Kōḷattā's travel to the Chola king

CHART 16. Tune Fragments

tempo. Despite the fact that the live performance by Rāmacāmi took 44 hours to record and was accomplished over a period of more than four weeks, the songs he sang a month apart remained within very restricted tempo limits. That suggests that singers and drummers interact in a way that helps to establish a standard performance speed.

THE WORDS OF A SONG

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the question of how the words of a song become adjusted to their musical background. In general, one unstressed syllable is equal to one quarter note in a tune. A stressed syllable, then, is equated with a half note (twice as long). The most-noticeable adjustment is in the simple lengthening of stressed syllables to fit the rhythmic structure provided by the drum. Some syllables are elongated so as to cover four or even six quarter notes. However, nonstressed syllables can also be lengthened as, for example, *cēṅ* in bar 9 or *ū* in bar 10 of Chart 17.

In bar 5, there is an isolated, but important, example of a shortened stressed syllable. The sound *ā* now fills a space of only two eighth notes when sung. In bar 8, syncopation is introduced by starting a new phrase, by a new singer (B), in the middle of the measure. All these possibilities are expertly exploited by the oral bard but are entirely lost in his dictated version. However, those losses are somewhat compensated by an increased use of metered lines and a tightened, more efficient, plot structure in the version he recited to a scribe.

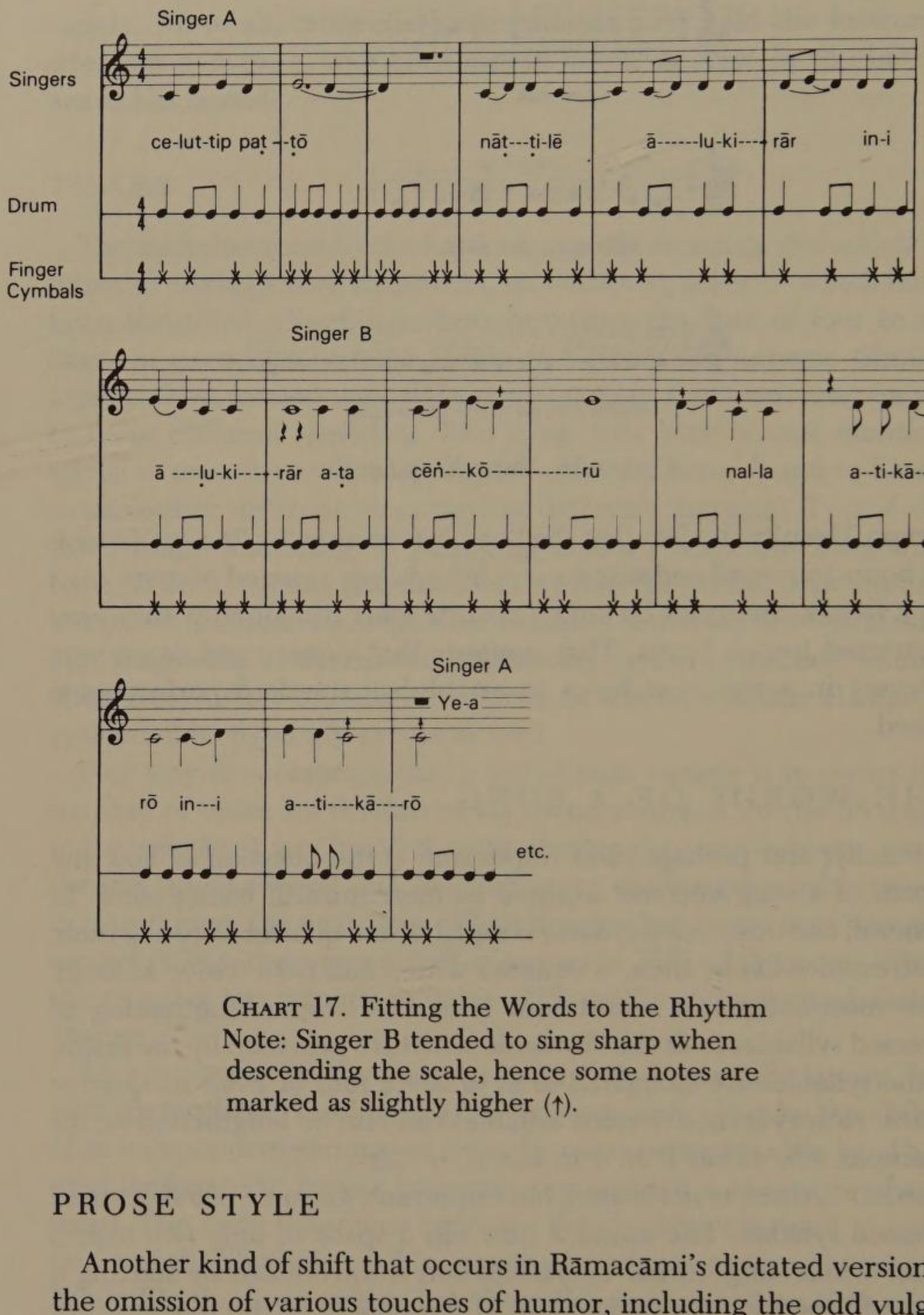


CHART 17. Fitting the Words to the Rhythm
Note: Singer B tended to sing sharp when descending the scale, hence some notes are marked as slightly higher (↑).

PROSE STYLE

Another kind of shift that occurs in Rāmacāmi's dictated version is the omission of various touches of humor, including the odd vulgar expression. The bard's live performance contains many usages of regional slang, while his dictated text comes closer to educated, standard Tamil. For example, the word *mancān* ("son") in the first text becomes *maintān* in the latter account. And the verb "to cook" or "bake with fire," rendered as *vēvuccān* in the bard's taped performance, becomes the standard *erittān* (also *vēka vaittān*) in the dicta-

tion. Some expressions are eliminated from the dictation altogether. At one point in the live performance, Vishnu teases Śiva, saying that he would have become nothing but "rat shit" if he had not received aid in fighting the demon Bhasmasura (i.e., he would have been reduced to leftovers).[16] Nowhere in the dictated version does Vishnu address Śiva in such an undignified manner.

In at least one place in the dictated text the flavor is changed by an alteration of the "facts" of the story. The scene in question shows Vishnu and his sister Pārvatī having a discussion. In both instances Vishnu begs Pārvatī to intercede with her husband (Śiva) on his behalf. In the performed version, Vishnu is the younger sibling. The sister's seniority therefore sets the tone of the whole, while Śiva takes every opportunity to tease his wife's younger brother. Here Vishnu is a kind of young upstart whom Śiva repeatedly tries to discipline. That rivalry and Śiva's attempted put-downs add color and appeal to the story. They also match expectations the bard's audience already shares concerning common tensions among in-laws. The dictated version, by contrast, makes Vishnu older than his sister. Now Pārvatī does not tease her brother, nor does her husband try to discipline him with the same comical zest. A subtle change in the rank order of the two siblings, then, entails a significant shift in the tone of the whole scene. Again it is the dictated account that emerges as the more-formal, less-humorous variant. The performed text leaves more room for dramatic development, as well as for general playfulness.

A further difference between the performed and dictated texts can be seen best in passages that have humorous overtones. Such scenes become shorter and sometimes more logical when dictated, but at the same time they lose their colloquial flavor. Most important, they lose their play on the long pause, and most of their use of onomatopoeia. In the following passage Vishnu finds Śiva trying to destroy the heroes' mother by having an elephant eat her. The idea that an elephant would eat a person is ridiculous, of course, but the scene becomes even more colorful when performed before an audience:

> Protector of orphans! Protector of the earth!
> mm
> One with the dark-hued body
> mm
> Thinking that it would eat it all up,
> mm
> While a little was left, without anyone knowing it,
> mm

(He) caught hold of the chief elephant's gullet and squeezed. It lay there choking, "Keraṭṭ . . . keraṭṭ. . . . keraṭṭuk keraṭṭunnu keṭakkutu."

The dictated text is definitely less imaginative:

Seeing this Vishnu said
"Ah ha! Things have gone badly."
"It seems that an elephant is going to eat (the pieces)."
And without anyone knowing about it,
He held the elephant's neck,
So that it could not swallow.

The bard uses several repetition devices in the live performance but not in the dictated text. One is to retell part of the story to a newcomer on the scene. In such situations, someone recounts what has just happened to the latest arrival. In the dictated account the narrator simply comments that a particular character summarizes foregoing events. Thus it appears that this local bard had an intuitive sense of an important feature of written words: a reader can review them at will. During an oral presentation one cannot go back and check on information. Only the narrator can provide a recap. Descriptive repetition also helps to compensate for the looser logical style of a performed text. And it helps to heighten the concreteness of live performances. When events are paraded again and again before the mind's eye they gradually become more "real."

Since Rāmacāmi was able to adjust in so many ways to the special conditions of dictation, it is only natural to ask if there were any dimensions on which he did not alter his presentation. The answer is yes. There are at least two ways in which he might have changed his materials but did not. For example, he did not substantially alter the means he used to indicate the passage of time. Rāmacāmi employed the present tense almost continuously in both accounts. Only a few narrative segments are set off by the use of the past. By contrast, tense forms are manipulated regularly in the two printed versions of the story I studied.

Although the bard's performed and dictated texts use tense in the same way, one device for structuring time differentiates them. In performance only, nonsense phrases (tannānnai nannē nannannā, tānānā nannai nānānē, etc.) occur at points of transition between major episodes and thereby give the impression of the passage of time. They are also used to introduce long journeys taken by a main char-

acter. When such sounds are sung, they serve as a verbal counterpart to a drum rhythm. Perhaps because they are like a kind of music, or perhaps because they are lines of nonwords, the bard eliminated these phrases from his dictated account.

Rāmacāmi did not change his pattern of enjambment for lines in his two accounts. In both versions the sentences run on, in a very informal style. Still, there are differences. Compare the two descriptions of Vishnu choking the elephant, above. In the live performance this entire passage is constructed from two very long sentences plus a number of invocations. In the dictated text, there are four sentences, only one of which is long. Reading is made easier by such short, tidy phrases. A performer's flexibility is enhanced, however, by allowing long and loosely defined sentences. Tighter grammar is needed when intonation, pause, and various other nonverbal cues become lost.

THE BARDS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

There are a number of singers in the Coimbatore area who can perform the Brothers epic from beginning to end. They vary in age from about 25 to 80. Such persons generally work in teams, with the lead singer being the eldest male. Roughly 50 such singers might be available in any one year, divided into fifteen or twenty small troupes. I encountered five different teams in action and heard about the existence of roughly five more.

In the past singers have almost always been men, but now women are gradually being admitted to the profession. A woman who appeared in a performance I attended in 1976 (see p. 88) showed excellent knowledge of the story and extremely strong dedication to the profession. Her role (as the sister of the twin heroes) would have traditionally been played by a man dressed as a woman. But now she acts in that capacity while her husband plays one of the twin brothers. She performs regularly, with both vigor and skill. This woman and her husband are on the road most of the year. They leave their children in the care of close kinsmen during their long periods away.

In general it would appear that a bard's career has four stages. The first is a childhood exposure to epic storytelling, usually through a relative who is a singer. Most begin by hanging around some local troupe in their youth. Then there is a period of formal apprenticeship, often with a teacher rather than a relative, beginning in the late

teen years. During this period the student singer takes the role of an assistant, repeating phrases after a lead bard in actual performances. But he must also practice on the side. Such apprenticeship may also come later in life, however, and it may remain the only role a singer has throughout his career. Most talented and dedicated bards, though, move on to a third stage when they become lead singers themselves. Now either they take over a troupe from an elder who goes into semiretirement, or they break off an old association and form a new, independent group. No one I met had heard of a woman heading a troupe. However, now that a few females are moving into the profession, even that could change. The bardic profession is not restricted by caste. Recruits normally apprentice to a known singer and do not express great concern over the question of community background. But such work is generally thought to be low class. It is lumped in a broad category that includes other musicians and entertainers. Most commonly, bards are drawn from non-Brahman castes that have held ritually significant traditional occupations. These include the barber, washerman, and potter communities, in particular.

Many troup members are actors as well as straight singers and storytellers. When acting, a bard will often dress in a simple costume and move around a large open ground as he sings. Generally, a local audience is allowed to surround such a performer, sitting either on the bare earth or on the porches of nearby homes. Not all the actions or events in the epic are dramatized by such actors, however. It is only at key points that a few gestures are made. Sometimes simple props, such as a hobby horse or a sword, are used. No background scenery is employed, and there is no stage curtain. Almost all performances are at night. Traditionally lighting was supplied by oil-soaked torches, but now petromax lanterns and strings of electric bulbs are used.

The fourth stage in a singer's career arrives when he becomes too old for the rigors of moving about with an itinerant troupe. Older bards tend to retire to their home villages where they continue to sing for friends while seated and without costumes or props. Rāmacāmi passed through all these stages, but because of the demands of his second career, as a barber, he was never with an itinerant troupe for very long. By January 1979 he was completely blind, but he had grown keener than ever on singing. He was then making nightly rounds of the village, singing to friends to pass the time. His skill in recitation was still at a peak, though his voice had lost some of its

tone. Rāmacāmi had also become toothless, so his pronunciation was not as clear as it had been. This fine bard still lives as these words are written.

Most singers have a minimum of schooling. These days many bards are able to read, however, especially if the print is large. Rāmacāmi once told me he had completed the sixth grade, but on another occasion he told my scribe that he had dropped out of school after the first year. Whatever the truth, Rāmacāmi's reading skills (before his blindness) were barely functional. Two other local bards questioned about their education also had a low level of schooling, one having completed the sixth grade, the other only the third. All three claimed that they constantly improved and elaborated their performance skills as their experience in the trade increased. Each said he consciously added new bits of the story picked up from others, and subtracted things that seemed less popular. No bard interviewed claimed that he worked with a fixed text.

These singers say that they encounter several kinds of audiences. Some people like the text of a story, while others prefer the jokes and asides. Still other audiences respond best to praise-songs designed to honor those who donate money at a particular session. Such contributions come in one-to five-rupee amounts. Each donor gives his name, along with some money, to a financial assistant who circulates through each audience for this purpose. That man reports the name and the amount donated to the troupe's lead singer, who then composes a small song in honor of the new patron. Any audience enjoys the competition this engenders, watching to see who will give the most and what the singers will say about him. Sometimes interest in this activity is so intense that the troupe does not start singing the story until well into the night.

Most performances are informally arranged. Usually a troupe will simply "drop" into a village, and if there is local enthusiasm they will set up their show. The number of nights spent in any one place is always tailored by the troupe's judgment of the extent of local interest. Singers say that they can spend up to three months telling the Brothers story if they include their entire stock of jokes and asides. More common is a two- to three-week stand, in which they focus on the main story. Most frequent of all is a three- to four-day performance that provides only a limited synopsis of the most-popular episodes. In between stands a troupe makes brief visits to its members' home area. There the singers visit relatives and recoup their

strength. Most groups get home once every seven to ten days. This work is very taxing, of course, since epic performances often last all night. During the day the singers try to sleep, but they are frequently wakened to be fed by local patrons.

Although it is quite acceptable to tell the Brothers story at any time of year, prearranged performances are usually associated with three major festival periods: the Mārkali full moon (in December–January), the Māci dark moon (in February–March), and the Āṭi dark moon (in July–August). For these major periods of temple activity, a troupe of singers is often invited in advance to entertain local temple crowds. It is common to plan such an appearance so that the bards end the story on a day that climaxes a set of local rituals. Suitable occasions include festivals for a variety of gods and goddesses.

The telling of the Brothers story usually attracts a large crowd. Fifty onlookers would constitute a small gathering, while 75-100 spectators are common. Crowds up to three or four times this size gather when the occasion is linked to an important temple festival. When the storytellers are commissioned by a private family and perform in a home courtyard or on a small neighborhood lot, the attendance is reduced accordingly. An average audience would include people of all ages and both sexes. The bards, therefore, continually try to please a great variety of listeners. The atmosphere is always informal, and the people are free to come and go as they like. Children often cry, while adults may whisper. This epic is said to be particularly popular with women (as is storytelling in general), but there was never a lack of men in the audiences I observed.

Two kinds of festival are particularly associated with a performance of this and similar legends. One is an annual celebration in honor of a local goddess, the other the worship of a clan ancestor. The first is usually financed by the general community, the second by a specific descent group. Significantly, many leading Kavuṇṭar families of the area do not take a great interest in the Brothers story. Indeed, today the story is more popular with handmaiden or allied caste groupings than with members of the heroes' own caste. For example, a group of Kongu Ceṭṭiar merchants holds an annual clan celebration at which the Brothers story is told.[17] Similar festivals are also popular among the Nāṭār (toddy tapping) and Uṭaiyār (potter) communities in this rural area. All these groups are linked to Kavuṇṭar agricultural activities, and that may explain their dedication to the story heroes. The Peruṅkuti clan (of the Kongu Kavuṇṭar community), to which

the heroes are said to have belonged, holds a regular festival in honor of the twins.

The story is generally performed in front of a shrine. If a permanent place of worship does not exist, a temporary alter is set up. Even when the story is sung inside a home, small lumps of turmeric are often placed in front of the lead singer as a symbol of the presence of the gods. Larger, makeshift shrines usually contain pictures of one or more of Hinduism's great divinities (Vishnu, Ganesh, Saraswatī, or Murugan),[18] and alongside these all-Hindu fingures the twin heroes of the story are often given symbolic embodiment. They are generally represented by earthen pots, filled with water and adorned with auspicious neem leaves. Another vessel, representing the sister of the two heroes, is enshrined in the same enclosure. No distinction is made between a performance in which the singers dress up and walk around and one in which they sit in place and wear ordinary clothes. Both types of performance are called *pāṭṭu* ("song accounts"). The Tamil word for drama *(naṭakam)* is not usually used to describe this style of epic storytelling.

A brief invocation is sung in front of a shrine at the beginning of each evening's session. A grander set of rituals is reserved for the conclusion of a troupe's performance. Then, incense is used and elaborate food offerings are placed in front of the several deities. The blessings of the gods are sought for all those who have performed or have listened to the story. A non-Brahman priest is usually asked to conduct this worship, while the bards themselves join the members of the audience as devotees. At the end, the leftover food is distributed to the gathered crowd.

Payment scales for epic storytelling vary with the number of people in a performance group. At 1977 rates, an average of about twenty rupees per day, per performer, would be promised to a group in advance. In addition, members of the audience were expected to contribute one to five rupees per family for each evening of attendance.

On one such occasion, in the village of Ōlappālaiyam, two rival temples, located side by side, each hired its own troupe. One group was associated with a so-called Eastern temple, the other with a Western one. Both temples were dedicated to the same goddess. The former was patronized by a wealthier and also more hierarchically inclined group of devotees. The latter's leaders were of lesser means and of a somewhat more democratic spirit. As was typical for these

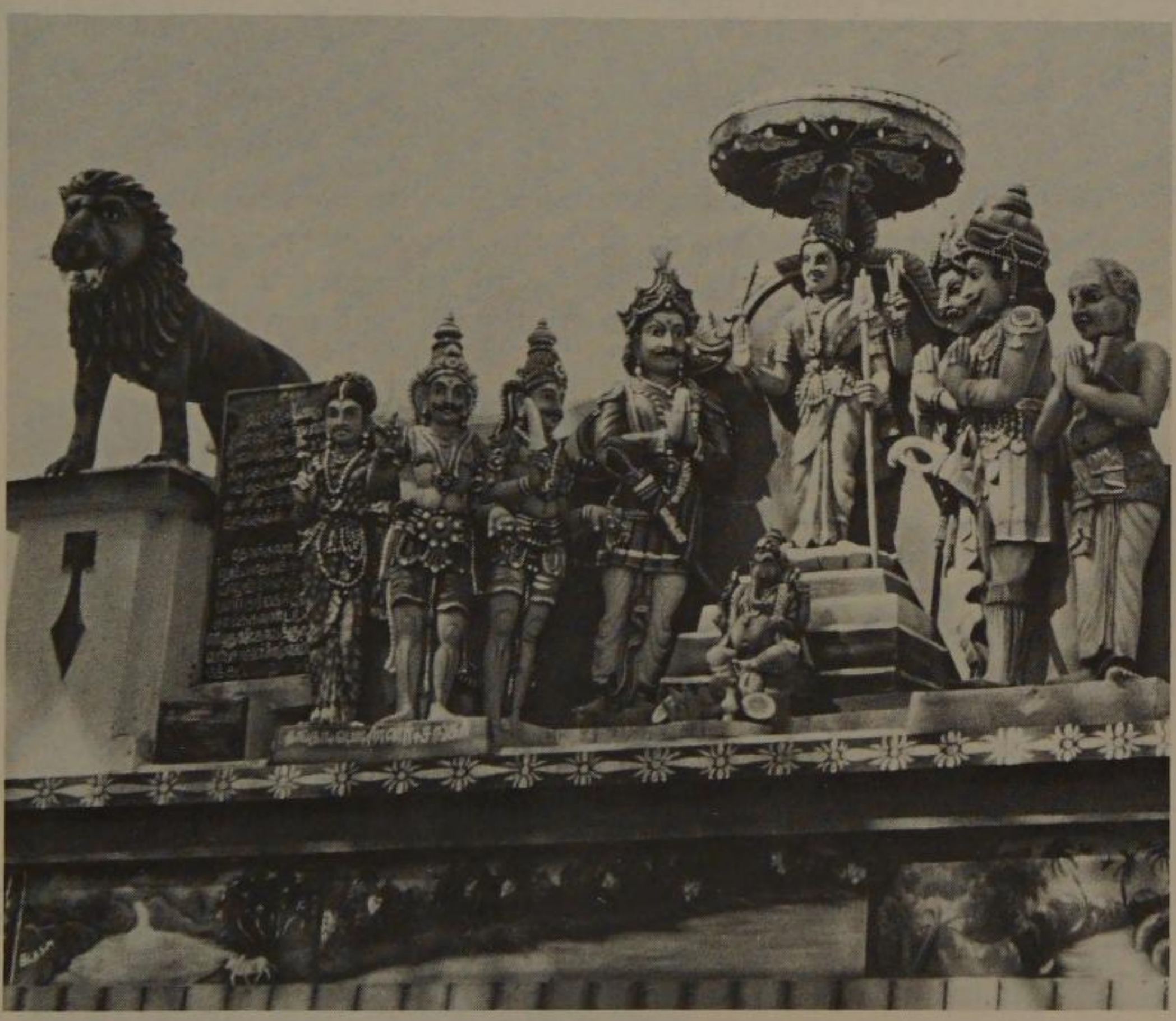
rival groups, the Western temple held the longer, more-popular, but less well financed celebration. Both festivals were held close to the full moon.[19]

At the Eastern temple the troupe consisted of four performers. They sang for about six hours on the night of December 30, 1976, the climactic night of the festival. The portion of the story they selected described the twin heroes going to capture a parrot for their younger sister. The bards received 150 rupees from temple funds and 36 rupees in donations from the audience. The lead singer was 37 years old. He and his wife, who was about 26, came from the same village. She was of the Paṇṭāram caste (non-Brahman temple priest), while her husband was a Vannār (washerman). Their out-of-caste marriage was unusual. Apparently the wife had danced and sung in the troupe as a young girl, and the association led to their wedding. At the time of the performance, she was about seven months pregnant, but that did not affect her acting. An assistant male singer, about 32, played the role of general "joker" and dressed as such. He was a Nāvitar (barber) by caste, and came from a different village. The fourth member of the troupe was a man dressed as a woman. He was about 30 years old. His caste and village were not known.

At the Western temple a troupe of two performers sang for three consecutive nights, December 28, 29, and 30. Their performance lasted two and a half hours the first night, four and a half hours the second, and five hours the third night. They presented a description of the heroes' mother's visit to her natal home, where she was beaten and mistreated. The singers were paid 97 rupees by the temple and received 25 rupees from patrons in the audience. The lead singer was about 35 years old. His brother, about 32, was his assistant. Both men were Kuravars (small game hunters and basket weavers) by caste.

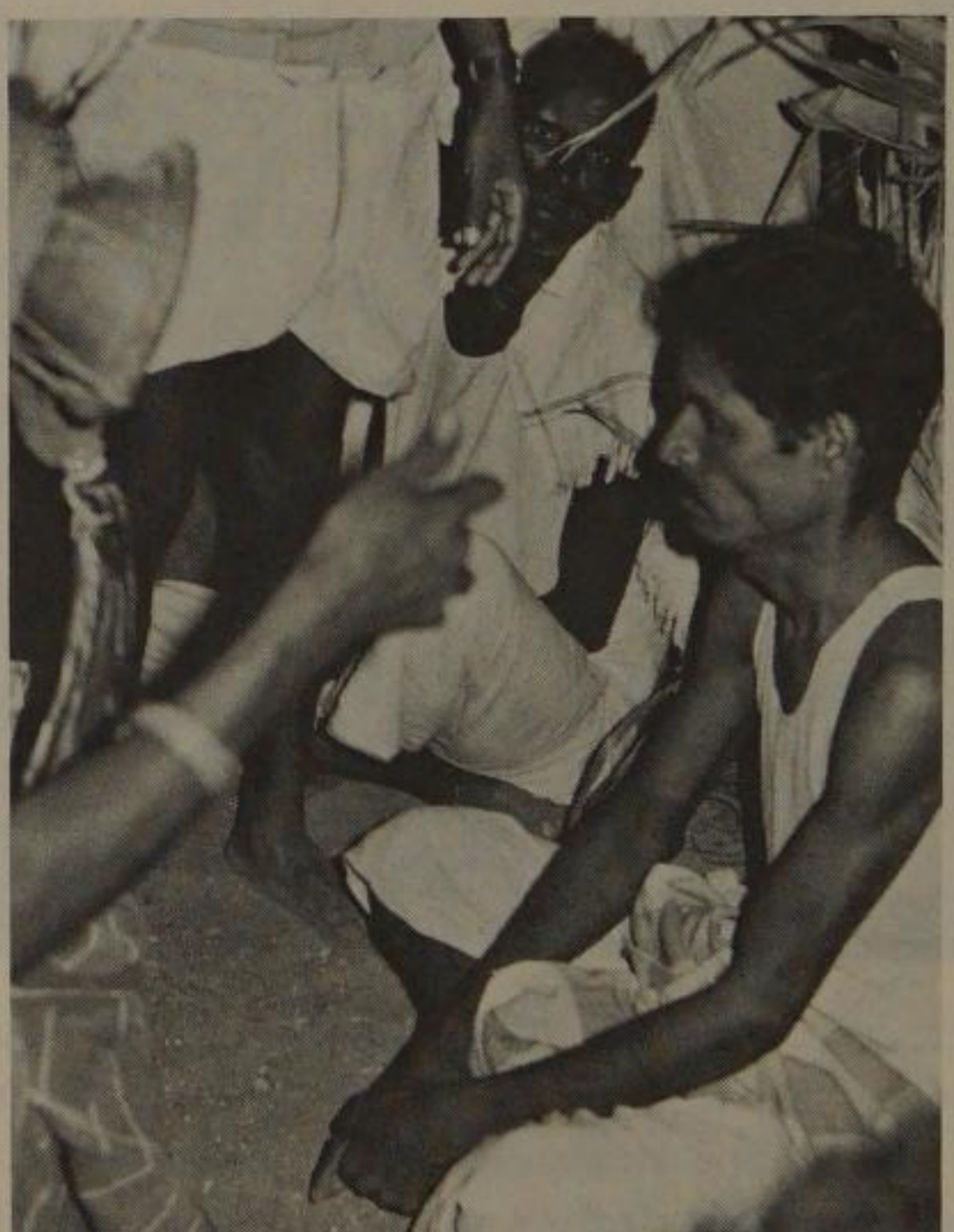
In sum, the bardic profession is relatively open in the Kongu area. The status of performers is not high, but dedicated singers are welcome, and few questions are asked about social background. Singing the Brothers story does not pay handsomely, but fortunately there is enough money in the work for a good troupe to make ends meet.

PLATES



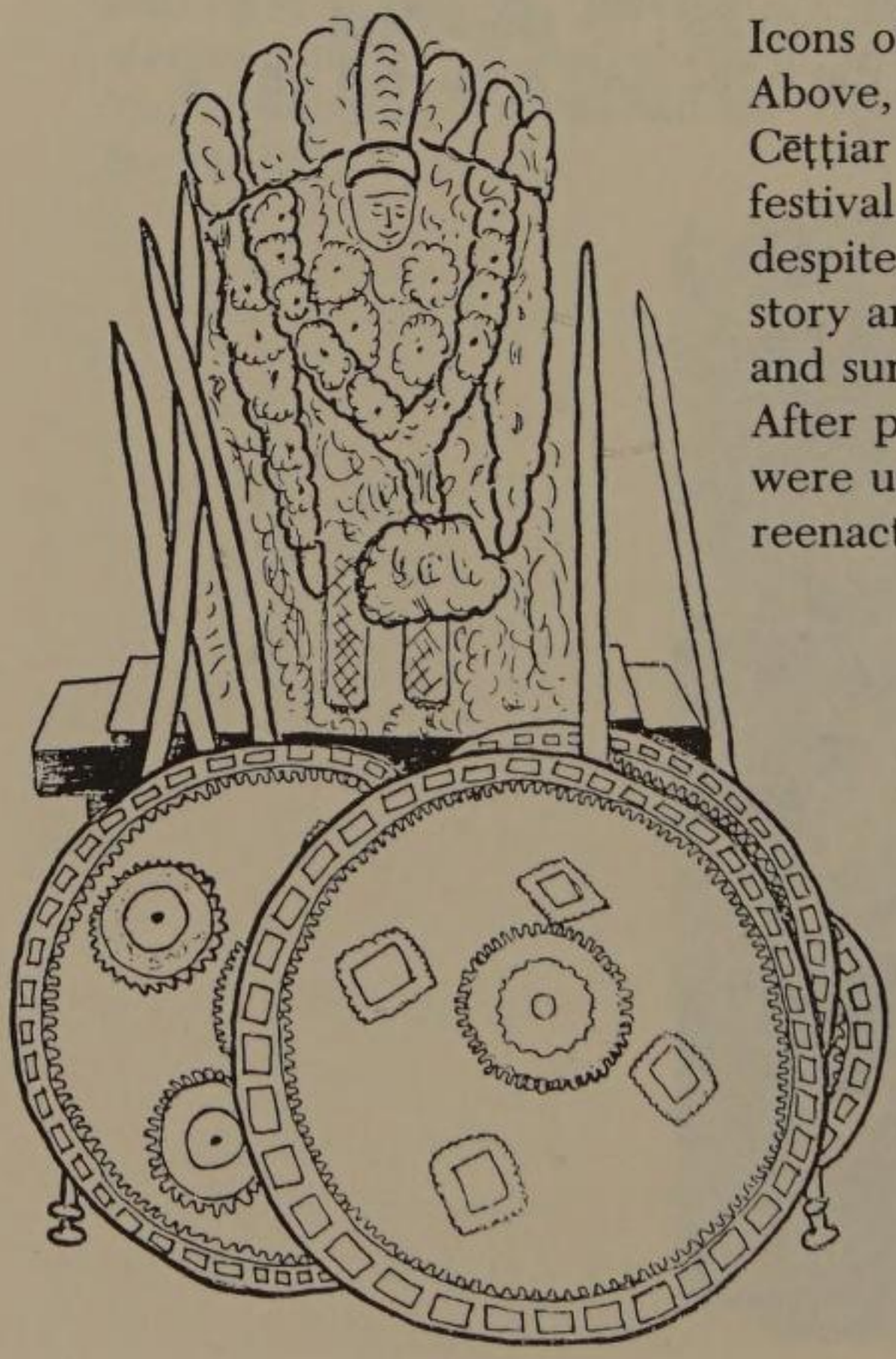
Frieze on the Cellāttā Temple at Matukkarai. The twin heroes and their sister (far left) are seeking an audience with the goddess Cellāttā (under the umbrella). The three slightly taller figures standing closest to the deity are (from left to right) a Pandiya, a Chola, and a Cera king. On the far right is a palace accountant.

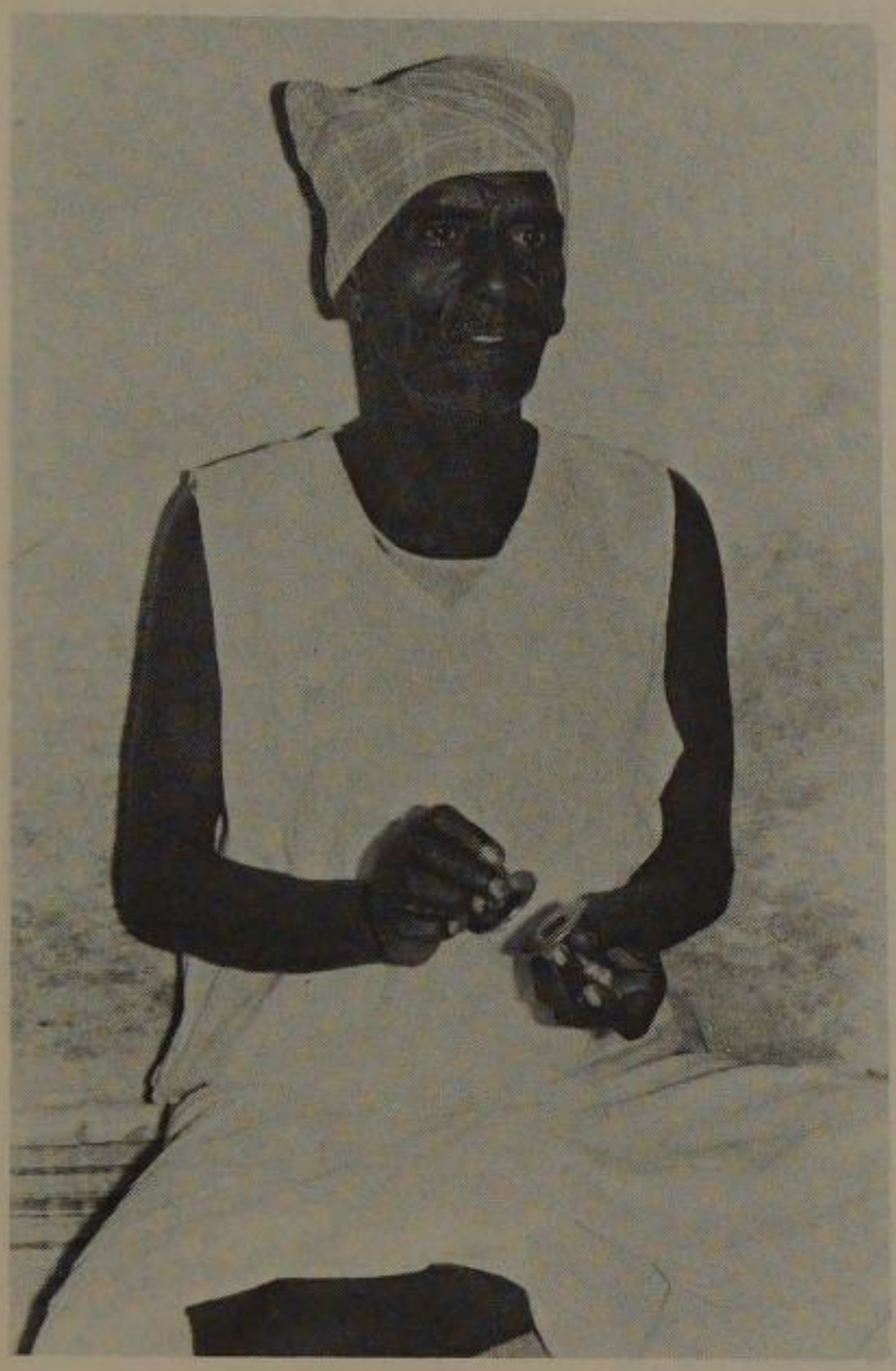
Two techniques for inducing identification with the story's heroes, leading to trance and then mock death. Above, carrying lighted torches symbolic of the battlefield; below, subjection to intense, loud drumming (a drum and the drummer's hand can be seen at the far left).



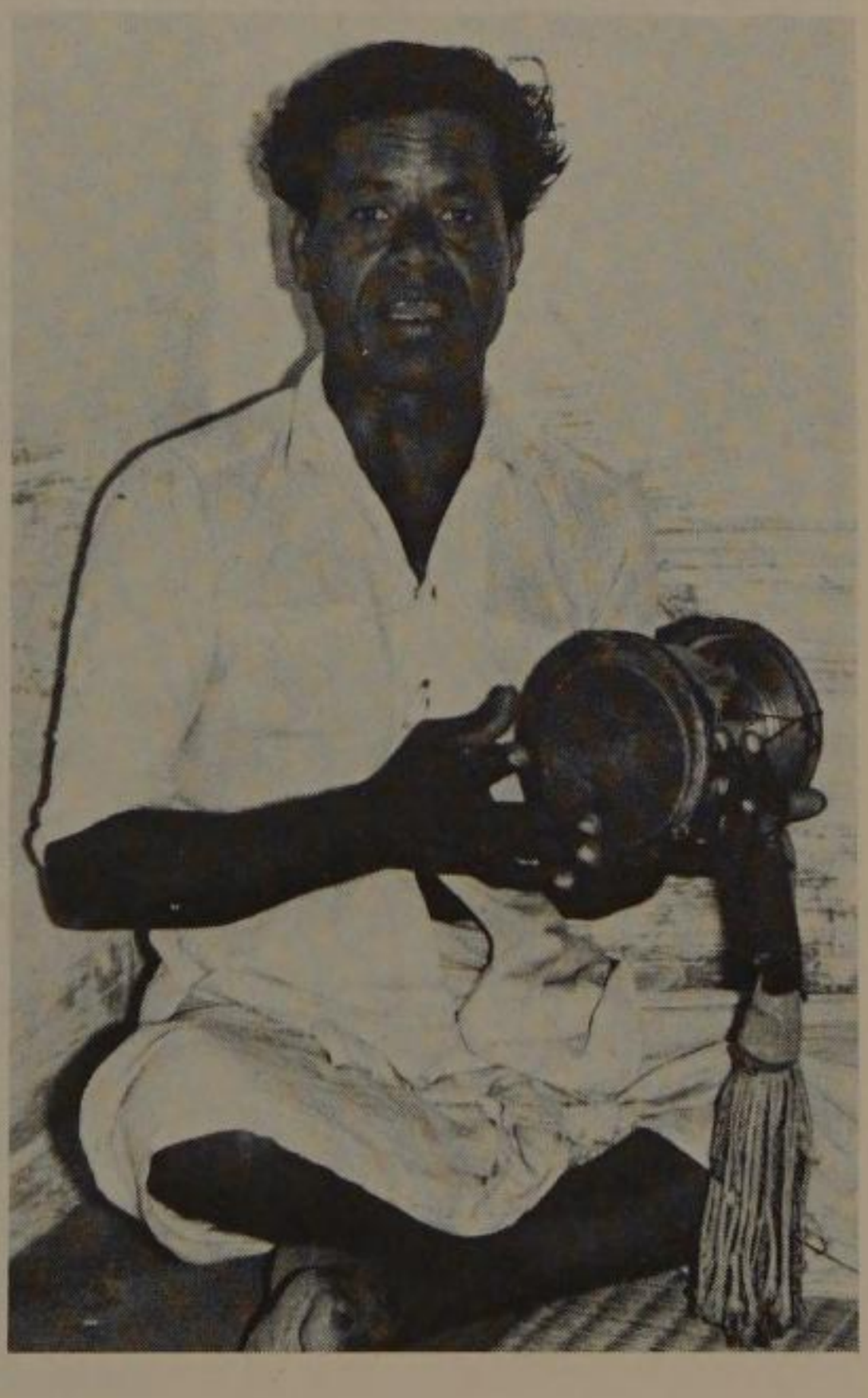
Above, a member of the audience falls into the mock-death position during a trance. Below, the fallen body is covered with a funeral cloth as if it were a corpse.

Icons of the lineage god Cēṭṭiarcāmi. Above, icon worshipped by the Koṅku Cēṭṭiar at the 1966 Taiyampāḷaiyam festival. Note that the image is single despite the fact that the heroes of the story are twins. Below, icon garlanded and surrounded by shields and swords. After preliminary worship, the swords were used in ritual proceedings that reenacted the story.

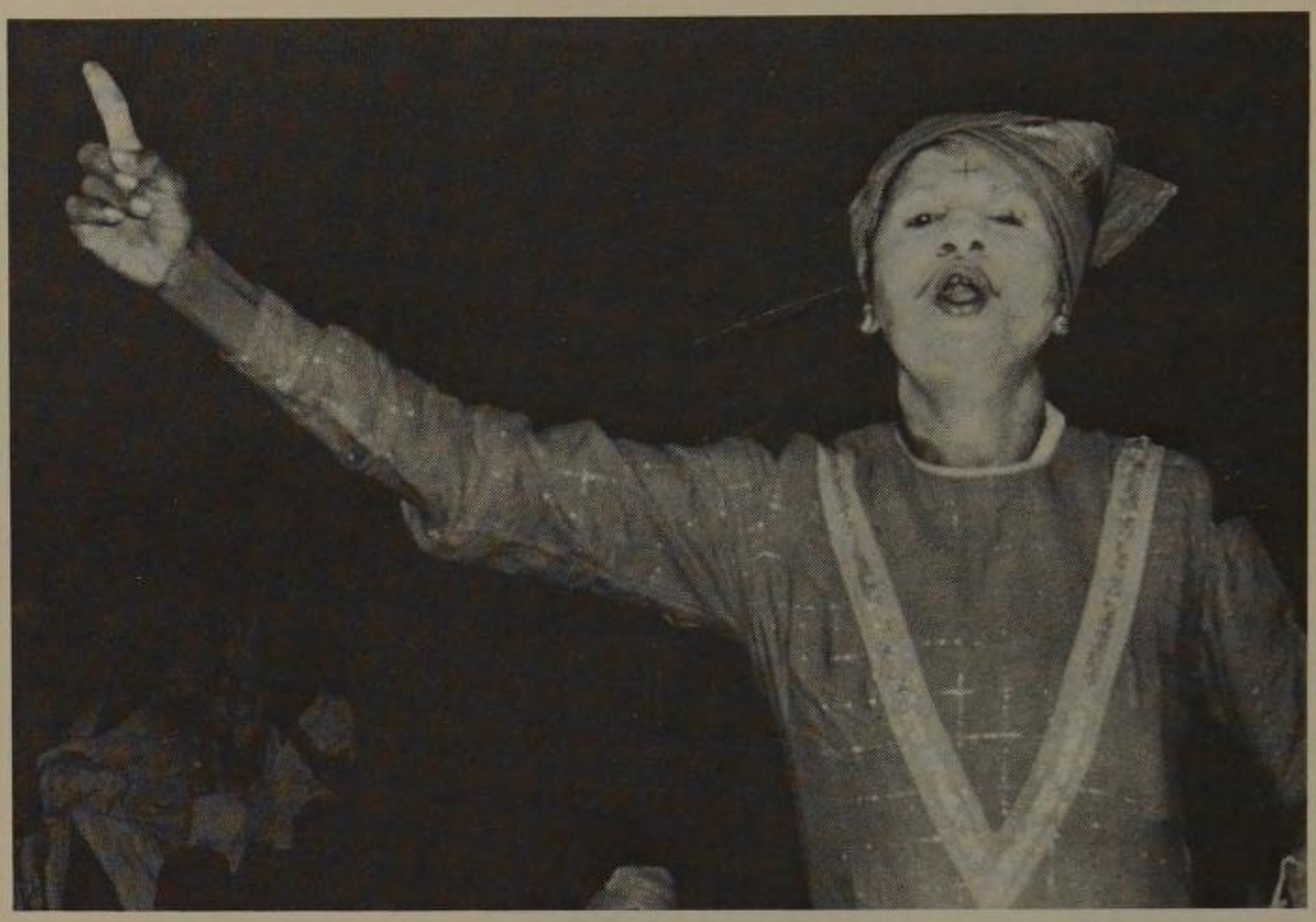




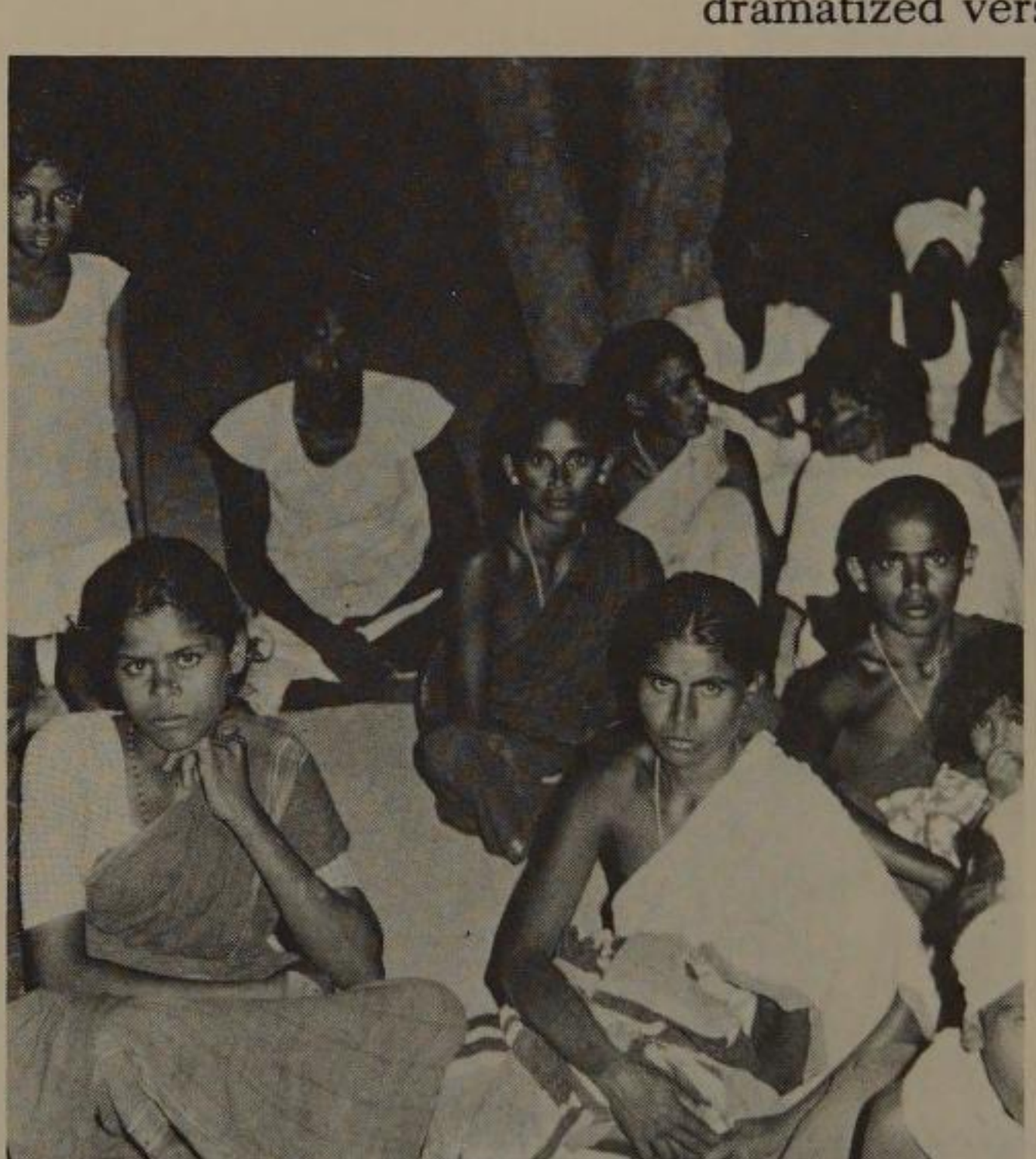
E. C. Rāmācami, bard of Versions B and D, holding the finger cymbals (jālarā), which are frequently used by a lead singer.



P. Paḷanicāmi, the bard's assistant, playing the hand drum (uṭukkai) commonly used in local performances of the Brothers story. Note the characteristic position of the player's right hand.



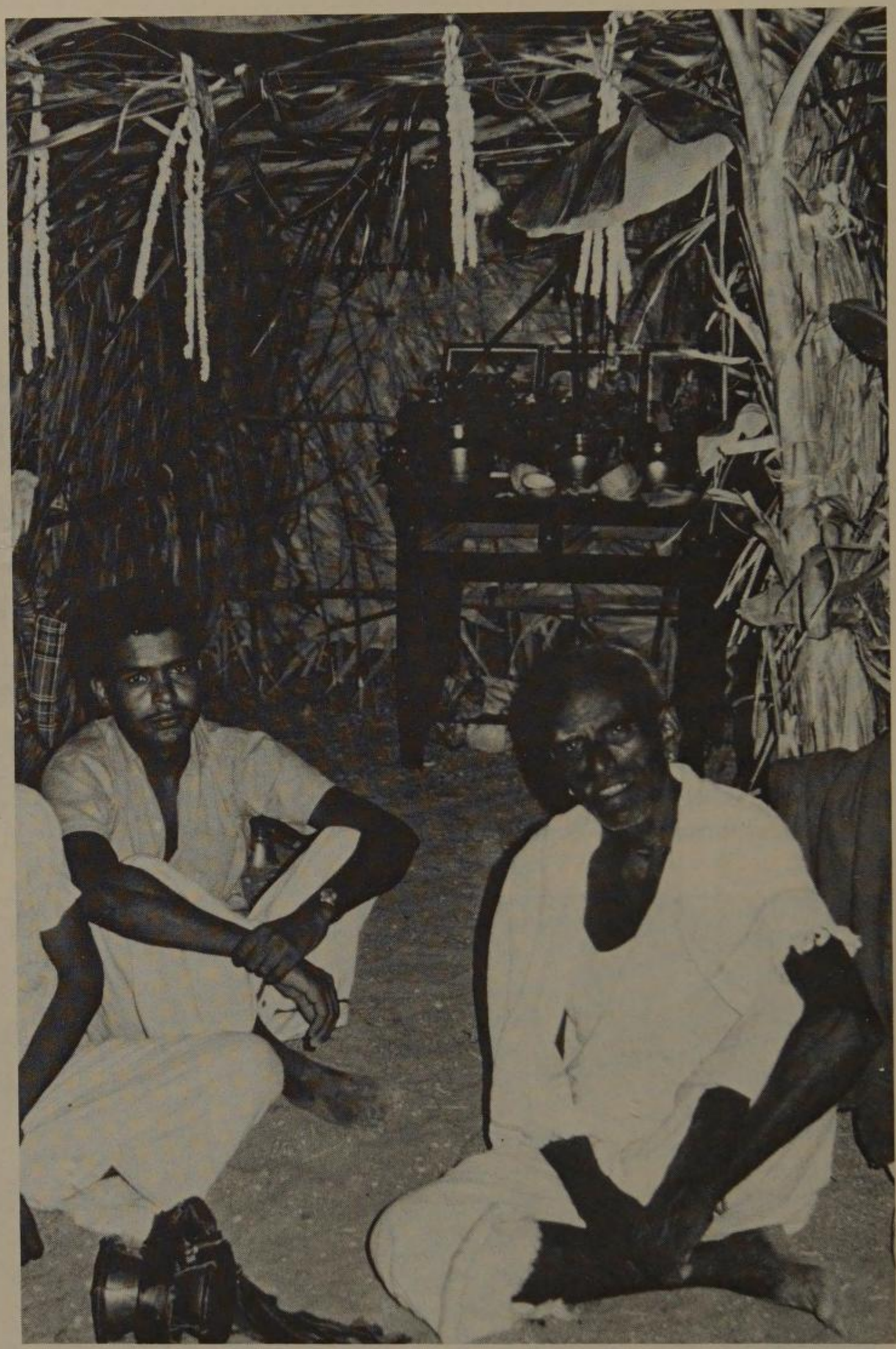
A lead bard makes a narrative point in a dramatized version of the Brothers story.



Members of a typical audience watching a dramatic performance of the epic in a village setting. Several mature men are in the background, some young boys are in the center, and two women sit in the foreground. Such clustering by sex and age is common at entertainment-oriented events.

Assistant bard (left), lead bard (center), and their locally appointed helper (right) thanking the audience for its generosity at the end of a performance. Note that each man has received a gift of new cloth.

Presentation of a new sari and bodice to the assistant bard (a male dressed in female clothing) at the end of several nights of performance. The donor (seated man) is the head of the most-powerful family in the settlement.



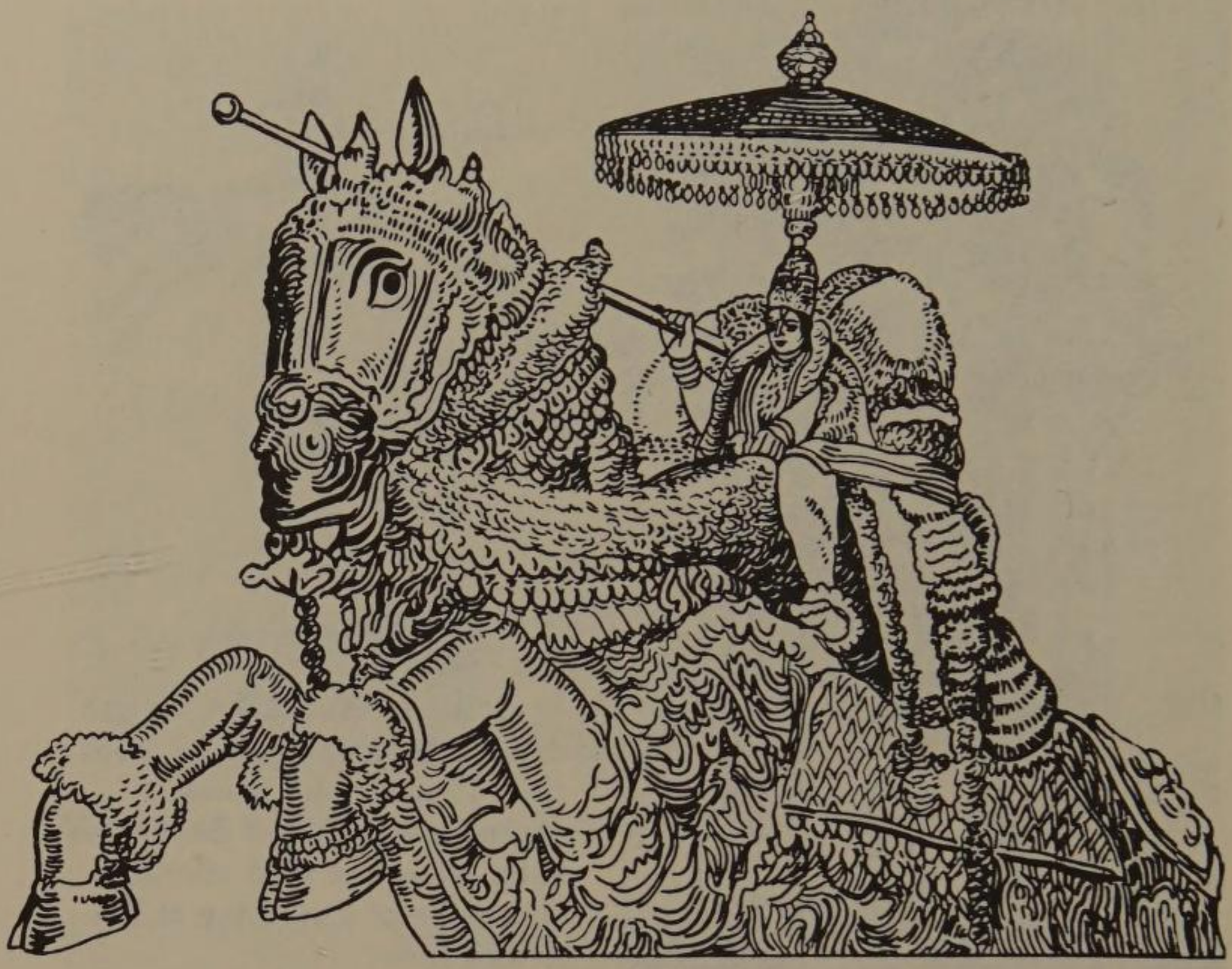
Temporary shrine constructed on one side of the village plaza for the several evenings during which a performance of the Brothers story takes place. The bards work in the open space in front of the altar. They consider their dramatized version of the story to be both entertainment for the gods and a ritual offering. The three brass pots on the altar embody the spirits of the twin heroes and their sister. Behind them are picture images of several great gods of the pantheon: Saraswatī (goddess of learning), Śiva and Pārvatī (creators of the world, of music, and of dance), and Murugan (a popular Southern divinity, son of Śiva). Note the bard's drum (uṭukkai) in the lower left corner.

The heroes' sister blessing a sword belonging to one of the twins and saying a few last words before his departure.

The killing of the great boar. Mural, Aṇṇanmār Temple, Cantaipputūr.

Painting on the wall of Aṇṇanmār Temple, which is dedicated to the Brothers. This panel lies next to other scenes showing the local heroes in battle, yet it draws on a different story tradition. The sketch depicts Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot into battle during the great *Mahābhārata* war.

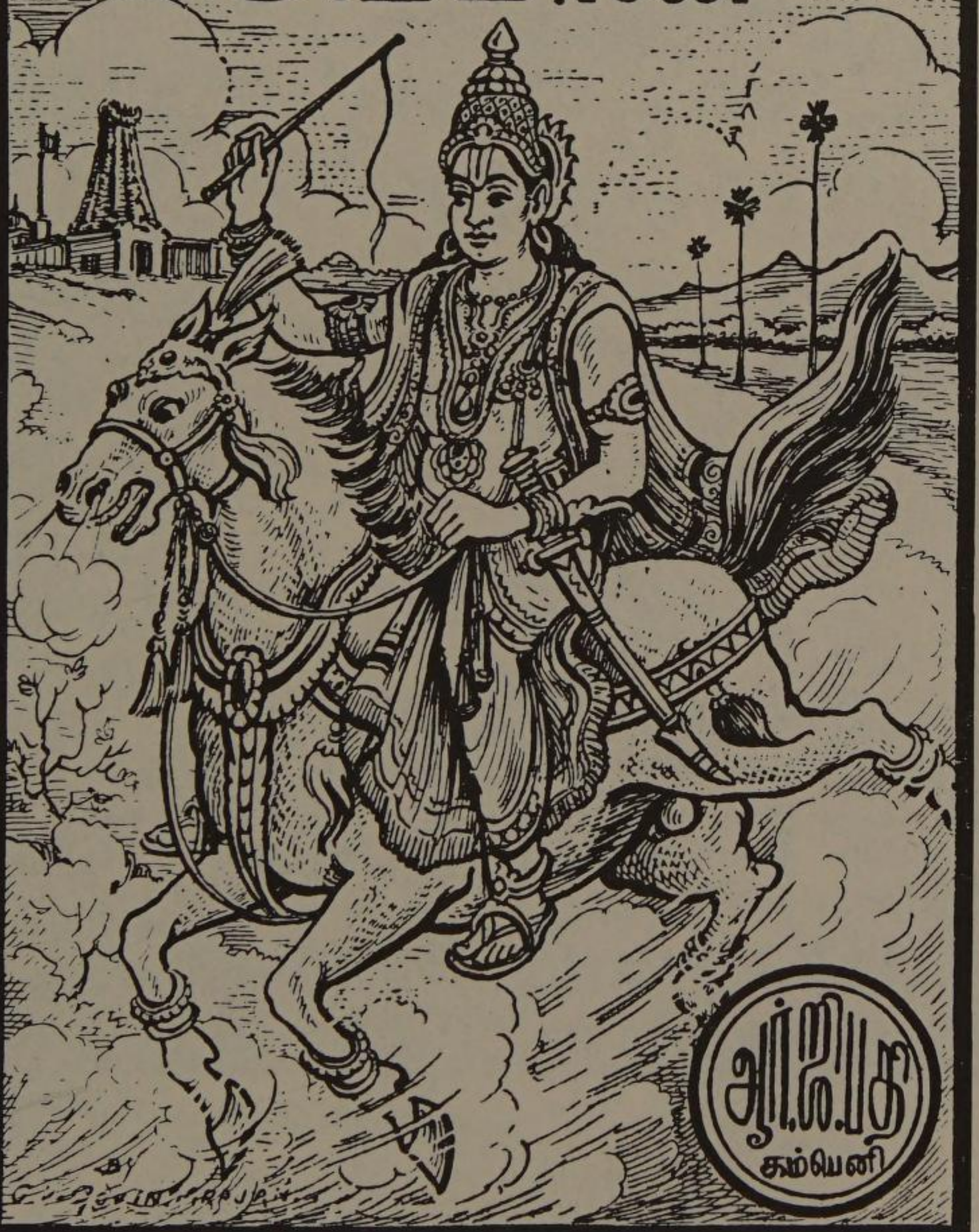
Typical clay and stucco images. Altar, Aṉṉanmār Temple. Above, the younger twin; below, companion image of the heroes' sister. Note the food offerings, also made of clay, lying at the sister's feet.



Three styles of illustration. Above, temple icon in poster style (Version L). Below, folk painting on wall mural, Aṉṉanmār Temple (Version B). Opposite, character sketch in popular chapbook style (Version I).

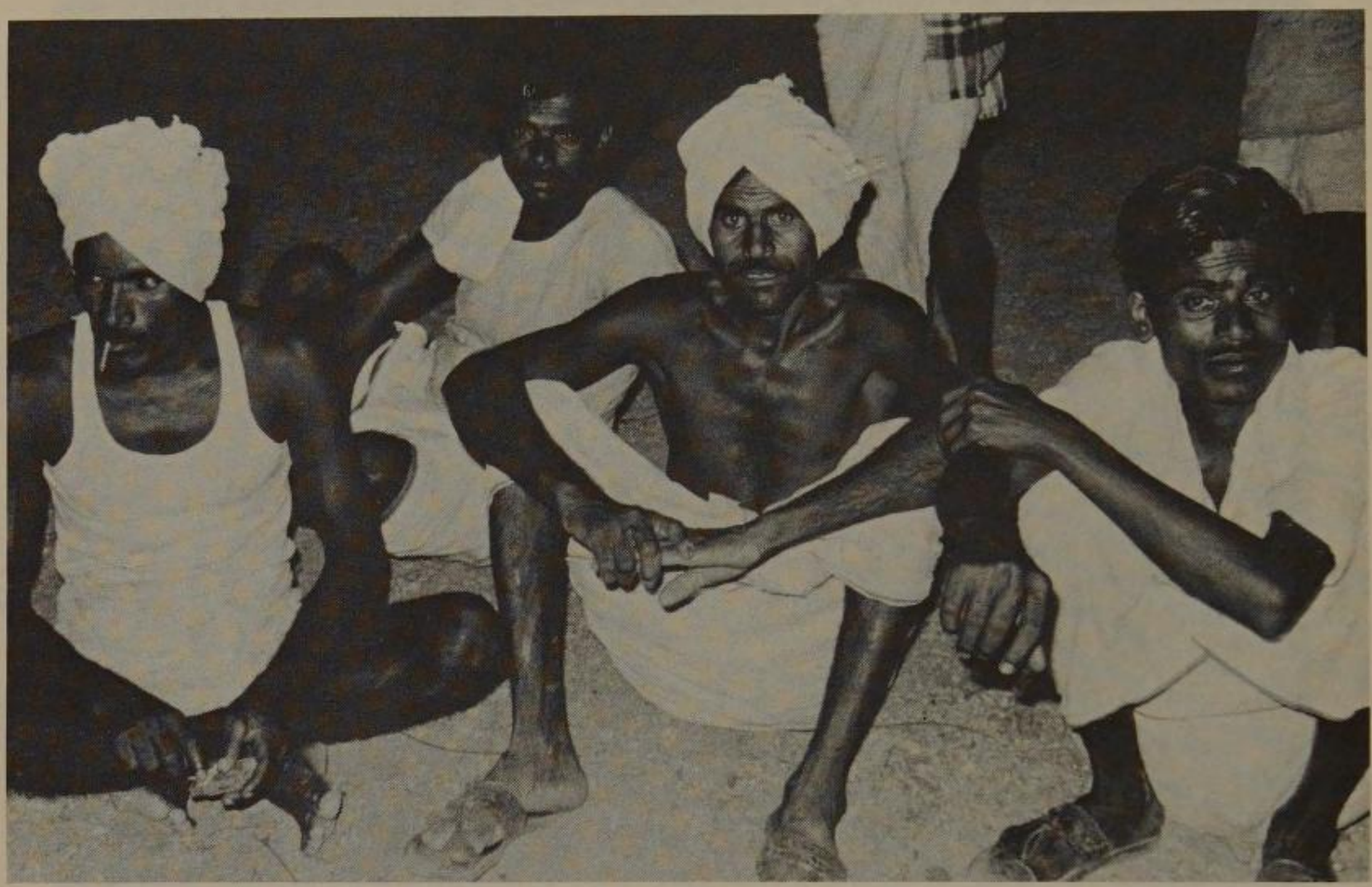
பொன்னழகு ரென்னும் கள்ளழகர்

அம்மானை



Lead bard impersonating the younger twin during a debate with his elder brother.

Above, the clairvoyant sister telling her brother about a vision she has had of his death on the battlefield. Below, later in the same scene, the brother has ignored her warning and has mounted his magical horse. The two men restraining him provide a sense of great agitation and force.



The audience during a nighttime performance.

FOUR
Printed Texts

MODERN POET'S RENDITION (VERSION L)

It is one thing to study how a village bard changes his style when he shifts from his normal live performances to dictation. But it is something else to observe how a more-scholarly man, working in an urban environment sets out his edited version of a folk epic. Kaviñar Caktikkanal *(*a *nom de plume)* now lives in Coimbatore city, but his roots lie in the rural part of the Kongu region where the Brothers story is commonly told. As a child he must have heard the story performed many times. Nowadays, Caktikkanal moves in intellectual circles, with local leaders who take great interest in promoting Kongu's regional culture. His text is the most widely read version of the Brothers story presently available. A second edition has already appeared, and, to my surprise, some of my own correspondence with the author has been added to its revised introduction. Courses in folklore at the University of Madurai use this published account, and several major research libraries in North America have obtained copies.

The source of Caktikkanal's text is shrouded in mystery. In his introduction, the author suggests that the reader inquire at the Cemmaṭai Vilvavanam Sri Aṇṇanmār temple, between Kodumudi and Erode. When I did so, the priest claimed that his version had been based on a palm-leaf manuscript belonging to Rājalinka Kavirāyaral of Tarakampatti village, in the Vīrappūr area, and that this

manuscript is now used there, at the Vīramalai temple, as part of a blessing for young children. But at this Vīramalai ritual center, the priest denied that any such manuscript existed.

According to several other people I interviewed, this palm-leaf manuscript, consisting of 150 pages (300 leaf sides), passed through many hands during the 1960s and had been seen by several poets, priests, and prominent leaders. In 1970 Tiru V. C. Taṅkamuttucu-vāmikal, of Vellōṭṭamparappu, a village located on the Kodamudi to Erode road, finally copy-edited this text and published it as a paper-back book (Version K). He claims that Caktikkanal's version was based on his manuscript copy. Strong internal correspondences strengthen this view.

In my view, Caktikkanal has borrowed material from the palm-leaf manuscript, but also rejected parts of it to create a more-contemporary version. It is instructive to study how that folk text grew and changed in the hands of this modern poet. His alterations provide evidence of the life, vigor, and truly popular character of the Brothers tradition. Though an absence of more information from Caktikkanal about his sources is regrettable, his poetic innovation is to be admired.

Printed copies of the palm-leaf manuscript (Version K) are very difficult to find. I obtained a handwritten copy only briefly, and at a very late date, and so I selected for study only a few excerpts from a wide range of places in the story. I compared 660 lines from it with their equivalents in the Caktikkanal version. The two samples share 250 lines, or approximately 38% of their verbal material, if one ignores minor differences within given lines. But the degree of similarity between these two renderings varies strikingly by subject matter. For example, in passages describing the penance of the heroes' mother, duplication climbs as high as 93%. Seventy-seven percent of the opening verses are the same, while blessings provided at the end of the story contain 50% common material. Two of several sections that are locally popular, however, exhibit more-extensive divergences. The description of the twins' death reproduces only 1% of the earlier manuscript's lines, and in the twins' heroic conquest of the wild boar, only 4% of the older material is retained. At these points the modern poet has rewritten almost the entire account.

In the descriptions of the boar fight and of the sister's grief, Caktikkanal's version lies close to the oral variants studied in chapter 3. Similarly, in the description of tricks played on the heroes by local

artisans and in the final verses, the contemporary poet appears to have taken his cue from local singers. In these passages, there is considerable similarity between his work and Rāmacāmi's versions, but in the parts that seem to have interested Caktikkanal less (such as the religious scene in which the heroes' mother does penance), he appears to have copied the earlier text extensively.

Some parts of the boar fight and of the heroine's lament are entirely new in the Caktikkanal version. The campaign against the wild boar contains more consecutive new lines (159) than does any other part of the story examined. The degree to which Caktikkanal altered parts of individual lines varies according to these same principles. When he is describing the daring, informal tricks played by the artisans, for example, he has changed (but not eliminated) a little over half the sentences found in his source text. In the more-formal lament section, he has altered only about one-quarter of the lines.

Over all, Caktikkanal's version appears to be 40% longer, and no section examined has been materially shortened. None of the basic story events have been left out, but many of the details have been changed. For example, the description of the army that fought the great wild boar was lengthened and includes new details about both the boar itself and the great hunting spear that killed it. The picture painted of the heroes in their battle dress, the account of their little dog, and the tale of their heroic conquest of the wild pig have also been expanded. That is, these passages are new relative to the source text. They are not noticeably innovative relative to bardic traditions. Indeed, at the more-exciting points Caktikkanal seems to have turned to living bards for inspiration.

In addition to these changes in descriptions, there are some interesting alterations in the narrative. In the palm-leaf manuscript, the parents of the heroes approach Śiva, together, to ask for offspring; and the father of the twins begs for the birth of a special family ally (Cāmpukā). In Version L, the mother of the heroes reaches heaven alone, and she (not her husband) is the one who asks for an extra boon. This change brings the text by Caktikkanal closer to contemporary folk tradition. Furthermore, he changes the mother's name from Periyanācci to Tāmarai, the name by which this woman is now popularly known.

Even more interesting is the fact that Caktikkanal has subtly shifted the introductory section of his account around. Instead of providing information about the heroes' own descent line, as the

older manuscript does, he provides ethnographic notes about the epic's contemporary devotees. The earlier text mentions that the twins belonged to the Cirurungaṅga clan of the Śiva gōtiram. Caktikkanal omits these details, but says that these heroes are now worshipped by the Tūran clan members of the Kongu Vēlīr. While the first genealogy has a prestigious vagueness about it, the newer one provides clear links to contemporary men and to a locally known clan of landowners. In the same way, the earlier work mentions the story's affiliation with the Kongu area as a whole (Kongu mantalam) and with one particular subregion lying just north of the Kāveri River (Mēl Karai Pūnturai Nāṭu). The recent text specifies a different area near Erode. It uses modern takuk and town names and cites a specific temple at a place called Mōḷiyapaḷḷi, which is a well-known center for Tūran clan worshippers (see map 2 in Appendix II). Caktikkanal has thus managed to link the story more firmly to his own family background and to the particular area where he has personal ties. Perhaps more important is the shift of emphasis away from the heroes' own descent line, toward the genealogies of contemporary devotees. This trend is carried further in the several essays Caktikkanal commissioned for the enlarged introduction to his second edition.

The modern poet also chose to give his rewritten text a more-literary tone. His style assumes a better-educated reader than does the simpler, older text. These subtle changes have been accomplished in a myriad of small ways. Some lines that had been in the plural have been changed to the singular form, and vice versa. There are changes from the third to the first person, and the reverse; and one can also find differences in tense. Many alterations in spelling appear, along with wholly new expressions that are more poetic and sophisticated. Substitute verbs or nouns have been used in the rewriting. Sometimes a single word in the older text becomes two in the new one, or vice versa. The use of emphasis is also varied. Sometimes grammatical stress is added; at other times it is omitted. Elsewhere whole sentences have been shortened by leaving out words or syllables, or by collapsing several lines into one. Such shifts can be observed even in portions of the text that, in other ways, remain basically similar.

The several types of changes just described suggest an interesting contradiction. On the one hand the modern poet has eliminated large passages from his basic source (about 40% of the original lines) and substituted new material that brings the story closer to contem-

porary bardic traditions. He has also placed new emphasis on a particular local cult, replacing the vaguer historical ties the story's heroes once had to a large region. All these alterations express the author's bonds to and interest in local family ancestries, as well as in contemporary folk variants generally. At the same time, however, various alterations in the tone and style of his prose take him away from, rather than toward, the language of Kongu's popular peasant culture.

This dilemma is one that many educated, modern Indian authors face. They wish to reach and impress a relatively educated and scholarly audience, yet they also want to convey something of contemporary folk literature, couched in a popular prose style. Though these traditions are rich and inspiring, their popular flavor is deemed inappropriate to the discourse of refined men. The result is an interesting tension among the several aspects of a modern author's intent. Caktikkanal's choice of compromises is well suited to the tastes of the audience he has in fact reached. Unlike any other version of the story, his book has been noticed by local educators and politicians and adopted as a text for college students. One can see here a new taste for blending literary refinement and popular content.

PAPERBACK EDITION (VERSION I)

The recent changes in the Brothers story just discussed reflect the modern enthusiasm for a return to folk traditions. But what about the evolution of this local epic in earlier periods? There is no way to date most of the eight available texts. Fortunately, one account stands out as a relatively early version: the *Ponnaḷaka Rennum Kaḷḷarakar Ammānai* (Version I), which is still sold by itinerant merchants at local festivals. No editor is named on the cover, but it is attributed to Pukalenti Pulavar, a Tamil court poet who lived at the end of the thirteenth century. But so many works have been attributed to this man that most scholars do not take the use of his name very seriously.[1]

This cheap[2] paperback is one book in a large series published by a variety of local Madras firms. They are small presses, yet some of them have been in business for as long as 150 years. The same stories have been issued in different editions, with no acknowledgments to other publishers.[3] Each press tends to re-issue its standard fare periodically, and no dates are used to indicate first printings. A personal

inquiry at one publishing company about sources yielded the following explanation:

> At some point in the past these folk texts were all copied from a large personal library of palmleaf manuscripts. Whose library this was, or what happened to the originals is not known.

It is regrettable that such important information has not been preserved. Nonetheless, these companies do deserve credit for continuing to make these older folk materials widely available.

Because differing editions of stories found in this format do not introduce alterations (beyond typesetting errors), and because the tradition of employing manuscript copyists has long been established in Tamilnadu, it is likely that Version I of the Brothers story has remained largely unchanged over a long period. Its relative antiquity is suggested by several clues.[4] For one, this version is organized according to a four-foot line structure, as are most of the older Tamil ballads.[5] The two other printed accounts I examined have a five-foot line structure.

Furthermore, the regional focus of this account differs from those of other versions studied. It is the only available text that links the Brothers story to the Madurai District, and the only one to claim that the heroes were Kaḷḷar (instead of Vēḷāḷar Kavuṇṭars). Many place names in this and other versions are the same, yet key positions are now given to a caste group particularly associated with the Madurai area. In addition, Version I is the only one to mention the Vaigai River and the Mīnakshi temple, both important features of the Madurai landscape, and to describe a Pandiya king of the Madurai area, rather than a Chola overlord.

All these details suggest that Version I is a southern variant. In fact, in light of other geographic clues common to many accounts, a penance performed on the banks of the Vaigai River would have been far more feasible than the heroine's journey to more-distant locales. Version I is the only account to locate the heroine's choice of place for her austerities so close to home.

The final and perhaps most-persuasive reason for thinking that Version I represents an "early" rendering of the story is its simplicity. It describes only two generations of heroes, while the other full versions available describe three. It also contains fewer ritual details; for example, it does not describe the way the heroes' house was decorated before their wedding or give a detailed list of offerings set before the family gods during worship. Being the most parsimonious

in overall form, this version also has some loose ends. In the accounts thought to be more recent, many small details are tied in better. New connections are made by adding explanatory information about previous generations. For example, one learns that the heroes' family was infertile because it was once cursed. The extension of genealogical depth, as a means of better locating key outcomes in prior events, is probably a developmental pattern common to late variants of a story in many folk traditions.

COMPARISON OF VERSIONS I AND L

A comparison of the "oldest" and more-recent variants will illustrate how the structural unity of the Brothers story has probably been improved over time. For example, in the oldest text, Version I, the heroes are raised in heaven by Śiva and Pārvatī. In later versions, they are raised by a local goddess who guards the lands close to their home. A social tradition of establishing family temples (common in the Kongu region) thus seems better tied into the events of the story in later versions. There is also very little evidence of clan rivalries in the early text and only a few isolated references to a scheming midwife set against the heroes by their agnatic cousins. In Version I one learns that the heroes beat up their own lineage mates when they hear that these men had once attacked their father, but it is only in later accounts that such events are linked clearly to a larger social canvas, and where two separate branches of this descent group are depicted as bitter rivals.

Generally, though, the overlap between Version I and other variants is not great. Hence, it is not very likely that the paperback text served as an immediate ancestor for these other accounts. Instead, it probably represents an early offshoot of the story that spread southward into the Madurai area. Other versions probably experienced an independent development, spreading in the opposite direction, toward the Kongu region. Nonetheless, there is one very striking description, which is almost identical in Version I and in Caktikkanal's story (Version L) and which appears in no other account I studied. In this instance a direct borrowing by Caktikkanal from Version I seems likely. The preciseness of the parallel is testimony to the fact that details contained in particular variants, once printed, can circulate separately long after their frame story has been accorded a separate identity.

Vēṭṭuva Pūjā for Kaḷi Tinnum Mallan[6]

Kaḷi Tinnum Mallan rolled his eyes and goggled, stared with both his egg-like eyes and rolled his pupils. As he opened his mouth and yawned pointedly, the Nāṭṭars (Vēṭṭuvas) saw that each tooth was a foot long, like a fat gourd. Their arms and legs trembled. The Mallan saw how the men led by Kāḷi were serving him. With a hand gesture he told them not to be afraid. He came closer to the Nāṭṭars and asked them: "Let me know why you have come. Oh, you Nāṭṭars, what have you come to ask of me?* State it without concealing anything." When the Nāṭṭars replied (they said), "We will tell you the reason for our visit. We have to rob Nelli Vaḷa Nāṭu, the incomparable country. Give us a boon (for success in this)." The Mallan said, "I will tell you after I eat. Wait a while." Saying this, he kneeled, opened his mouth and, taking the balls of kaḷi one by one, put them happily on his tongue. After eating the rice preparation, the mutton curry, and the curry made with the head of a lamb,† and after swallowing three hundred baked chickens, he finished off, in half a second, a hundred pots of sweet wine. After eating all these he said, "Hey, you Nāṭṭars, my stomach is empty. This hasn't filled a quarter of my belly." Being thirsty he came to the edge of the Kāveri River and slurped up the water, not leaving even a spoonful (there). After filling half his belly he came running and asked, "Hey, is this all the pūjā? Or do you have something more?"[7]

*Line omitted in Version L
†Line omitted in Version I

There are a few other places where the wording of short passages in these old and new accounts is suggestively similar. For example, what is presented in a question format in the earlier text may take the form of a poetic metaphor in the later one and become slightly less colloquial:

Version I	*Version L*
Is not the meal taken without (the company of) a son equal to a worm? Is it not the same as medicine?	My meals without a son are, to me, the same as worms. My meals, without a son, are like medicine to me.
Is the stone a pillow for you? Has the forest become your soft bed? Is the grass a pillow for you? Is the earth your soft bed?	You used to complain that you could not sleep on a soft mattress Now you lie on a hard rock

In another case, a straight adjectival description takes on a fancy literary flourish:

Version I	*Version L*
His eyes blazed in anger	Those two oleander eyes blossomed into red oleanders. The blue (dark) pupiled eyes became live coals.

Because the above passages have a stereotyped quality, it is not certain that Caktikkanal borrowed them directly from the early text. Instead, these later excerpts probably form part of a larger corpus of formulaic materials shared by folk bards throughout the area. Caktikkanal may have invented slightly new wordings but kept their overall formulaic quality. That would again provide evidence of his taste for a contemporary blend of literary and folk styles.

Despite minor examples of overlap, contrast rather than similarity is one's general impression upon putting these two variants (I and L) side by side. Most striking of all is the changed interpretation of the twin heroes' personalities in the modern account. Their behavior is now more refined, in keeping with their more-prominent social position in the later text. In Version I the twin heroes are out-and-out warriors, opportunistic, and even bullish. But in Caktikkanal's more-literary account, they tend to rely on their training in moral philosophy and on ritual values more than on pure courage and brawn. Such differences seem to stem as much from the audiences at which the two works are directed as from their different times of composition.

A good example of differences in the underlying moral perspectives of these two works can be drawn from a scene describing a dishonest artisan who has attempted to steal a gold measuring vessel from the heroes' palace. In the earlier account his ruse is quickly discovered, and he is beaten by the younger hero. This older version emphasizes the importance of a quick physical response on the part of the man who is wronged. On his return home, the thief tries to explain his bruises to his wife, who takes this opportunity to make fun of his lack of courage. That gives the bully a chance to beat her, in turn. In the modern account, the scene is handled very differently. Here, the artisan's theft is used to play up the elder hero's tolerance of troublemakers, and the artisan is not beaten or sent home. Lying like a trooper, he chooses a strategy that is likely to appeal to a refined

hero. Now, the artisan refers, in rapid succession, to a concept of fate, to the hero's devotion to Śiva, and to the impropriety of stealth. At the same time he introduces a subtle sexual accusation, implying that the hero took something once enjoyed by another man's wife. The elder twin's toleration of these insults plays up his generosity. In the early text, this scene does not turn on subtle definitions of morality but relies instead on a direct expression of anger.

Version I

> Then his mother looked at him and said, "My son, how did you become injured? Did you get torn up by the wild thorns?" The artisan replied, "No, mother, on my way a tiger came and confronted me. I caught hold of it and beat it with my hands. That tiger's claws tore my body." Hearing these words, the wife said, "No, my husband. Don't talk so beautifully, as if this world doesn't know about your valor! Don't gab on here without shame. If we were to go into a dark house you would (insist on) walking behind me. If I told you there was a snake in (our) bed you would run, letting the (waist) cloth you were wearing drop behind you. Why do you talk vainly of your valor now? As if you were capable of going to a place where tigers stalk, when your very life would cease if someone (so much as) said that a tiger was coming!" When she had (finished) speaking thus, the artisan got up angrily, caught hold of his wife and beat her up.

Version L

> "Having brought a golden measuring vessel, oh Śiva, it has now become a wooden one. What shall I do about this deficiency (in my) fate? I came thinking that there could be no theft in the great farmers' palace. I came thinking that nothing could come to harm in the Vēḷāḷars' palace. Even a Vēṭṭuva comes out better. Oh, Śiva, (here is) a great wrong done by the Vēḷāḷars. Even the Kannars and Marvars[8] are better than the Vēḷāḷars, oh Śiva! (Look) how he has destroyed the nest egg I had (cared) for. He who has taken (my) measuring vessel knew it would create a scandal if he robbed me by force. So he dared to take the vessel by unwrapping the marked package.[9] How can he bear the thought of having stolen an object enjoyed by a goldsmith's wife?" Saying this the artisan lamented with the words, "Alas, Śiva," and beat his breast.

In many other ways these two texts differ in their views of moral behavior. For example, in Version I the heroes cut off the noses of their Vēṭṭuva enemies during a fierce battle; but in a similar scene in Version L (this time with enemy cousins), the heroes' rivals merely get a whipping. Similarly, in the latter version, the twins' sister re-

strains her brothers from tying wooden wedding necklaces on the wives of the enemies. She feels that the insult would be too great. In the same text the heroes' mother respectfully coaxes a big black boar to stop blocking her path, feeding it cooked rice. In the earlier account she simply kicks it.

One can also contrast the endings of these two versions. In Version I the younger hero is hit on the forehead with a magical arrow. He responds by trying to attack his assailant, as any warrior would. Finally, realizing that the arrow comes from the gods, the hero accepts it as a sign that his time is up and ends his life by cutting his own throat. No philosophical questions are asked, and no mechanism is introduced for getting the heroes to heaven. In the modern text, by contrast, matters are much more complex: The hero catches the arrow in his hand, reads a fateful message that has been tied on it by the gods, and realizes that the end is near.

Caktikkanal's description of the death of the heroes' affinal cousins (who are treated as fraternal allies) is also interesting. According to his version, they die by drinking poisoned water. This scene parallels one in the *Mahābhārata* where four of the five Pāṇḍava brothers die by drinking poisoned water from a tank. Both in that classical epic and in the local account (Version L), the eldest remains alive and must then pass a philosophical test set by Yama, the god of death. In the *Mahābhārata,* Yudhisthira is asked what he thinks is the strangest thing in life. He replies, "Seeing others die and yet not believing one will die oneself." The eldest twin in Caktikkanal's account is queried about death too. His answer is noticeably different. Asked if the fallen men should be revived, the elder brother says with resignation, "The dead must remain dead so that the living may also have their chance." In broad outline, then, these two scenes are very similar, and Caktikkanal surely intended the parallel. But in detail the attitudes expressed by the heroes are quite different. Yudhisthira's answer stresses fate and ultimate dissolution, while the local hero's main concern is with the living. These twins have an action-oriented creed.

VERSION J

The last text to be considered is a pamphlet-length summary of a radio play broadcast on February 2, 1966. Later, the same text was used as the basis of a three-hour urban stage play. A full version of

that drama was not available; however, even the brief summary I obtained helps one to glimpse another writer's contrasting approach to "modernization." The author of the radio play, P. Kaṇṇanār, is especially concerned with accuracy and authenticity. His long introduction to the story provides many details about the sources he consulted, and he outlines various research trips he took before composing his text. His version is based on childhood memories plus a careful reading of five printed sources. Compared with the Caktikkanal text, the radio play is more realistic and more scholarly.

The mythological overtones of the Caktikkanal text stand out. This version contains a frame story about Śiva's wife Pārvatī, who is reborn on earth as a powerful local goddess and penitent. Periyakkāṇṭi, as she is called, later helps the sister revive the twin heroes after their death. Nothing similar is found in the radio play. Lord Vishnu plays a special role in Caktikkanal's text, too, by preventing the elder brother (Ponnar) from committing suicide. In the radio account, he purposefully stabs himself. The former describes a golden ladder, made from Śiva's own bow, which the heroes and their sister climb to heaven, while the latter contains no description of a revival. Instead, the heroes' father surveys the scene of his sons' death. He then delivers a discourse on bravery and tries to persuade the general populace to worship the fallen men.

These two versions differ as well in terms of the place accorded to heroism. The Caktikkanal account shows the infant twins escaping from a wicked midwife at birth. And at death the younger twin (Caṉkar) adopts the ancient heroic custom of ritual starvation. The untouchable First Minister is made into an additional hero when he also commits suicide. In the more-practical radio play, the twins are not given magical properties at birth. And the heroes die more normally, too: Caṉkar expires from an arrow wound inflicted by a Vēṭṭuva leader, and the loyal First Minister later dies of grief.

The modern poet makes considerably more use of heroic hyperbole. He depicts the parents of the young twins spending years of exile in enemy territory, for example, and describes a Vēṭṭuva leader's attempt to make the twins' chaste sister his own mistress. A single wild boar, similarly, is shown to destroy the heroes' entire set of crops. And the parents of the heroes die conveniently, of nothing more than old age. The radio play has the parents spend their years of exile among less-hostile neighbors, and no demeaning incidents occur. Similarly, when tragedy does strike it is more realistic. A

whole sounder of boars is needed, in this account, to destroy the heroes' fields. And when the mother of the twins dies, it is because of a raid the Vēṭṭuvas make on the palace. The father, who survives in the radio play, becomes a philosophical ascetic who is quite willing to leave the management of the kingdom to others.

The modern poet's version has the feel of an exaggerated story while the radio play is more down-to-earth. These differences are important, not so much in assessing the relative "truth" of the two accounts but for the light they throw on local modernization processes. There are several directions that the contemporary rewriting of a folk text can take. One is to weave classical overtones and/or contemporary folk imagery into a pre-existent text, as Caktikkanal did. Another is to trim both fantasy and hyperbole away from contemporary tradition, as the author of the radio account tried to do. Any modern folk author must make a choice between these competing and significantly different concerns.

As we compare older and relatively unsophisticated versions with contemporary, semi-urbanized accounts, certain interesting shifts have thus become apparent. The modern texts contain the most-complete and integrated story details. They support more-complex action sequences and show special concern with ethical and philosophical issues. These recent developments appear particularly linked to the sensitivities of India's growing city-oriented, intellectual community and the new interest in folk traditions among urban people.

FIVE
Story Structure

A local epic has more depth than a study of its descriptive passages alone can uncover. The Brothers story provides one with patterned relationships between several types of scenes, and also between whole sequences of events. Striking parallels with India's great epic literature play a role in organizing the structure of this local narrative. A set of partial correspondences between local and pan-Indian epic organization can thus provide the key to significant regional innovations. This legend's own ranking of occupational categories, for example, implicitly rearranges the varna hierarchy established by classical Hindu social theory. There are also interesting contrasts in the organization of the respective heroes' sibling sets. These and other local features are used to play with various orthodox principles of social order so as to express covertly popular feelings of ambivalence about them.

VARNA CATEGORIES

In India's classical epics human society has been divided into four great categories. The *Mahābhārata,* for example, names four varna groupings: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra.[1] Members of each category have a special duty or role. Brahmans study religious texts and perform sacrificial rites, Kshatriyas protect society, Vaisyas support and maintain human life, and Shudras serve others with their labor.[2] In the Brothers epic, however, these vague varna labels

are not mentioned by name. Relationships between concrete occupational classes are described instead. Although Rāmacāmi's version contains very specific roles—one caste group picks flowers for use in rituals, another builds palace walls with stone, and a third manufactures jewelry—the larger organization of these occupational categories does reveal an implicit awareness of the pan-Hindu varna theory.

In the case of the *Mahābhārata,* the duties of a Brahman and of a Kshatriya are often shown to be at odds. In a famous argument between Bhīma and Yudhisthira, Bhīma stresses that it is the Kshatriya's duty to take active revenge against enemies. His elder brother, by contrast, insists upon a Brahman viewpoint that places forgiveness and moral responsibility above all else.[3] The narrator further highlights this opposition by stating at several points that a Brahman must never harm any living being intentionally, while a Kshatriya should administer justice with his full power and might.[4] In the Brothers story this difference between Brahmans and Kshatriyas is never discussed openly. But implicitly this theme is given great prominence, as the elder hero always argues in favor of restraint and forgiveness, while the younger objects and advocates physical punishment. In both stories, then, two brothers disagree on strategy, the elder being Brahmanlike and the younger a Kshatriya in style. These parallels are pronounced in bardic versions of the local account, but less clear in printed texts.

A second important varna opposition, that between Kshatriya and Vaisya, enjoys much less prominence in the *Mahābhārata.* But in the larger mythical traditions of Hinduism, this second set of rivalries is important. It concerns the relative value of warriors and artisans. Several famous myths imply that a hidden in-law relationship exists between these two varna groups. In a story about the artisan Vishvakarman, for example, that great architect of heaven finds the sun (his son-in-law) too hot. So he proceeds to trim it down on his lathe. Since many Kshatriya rulers have claimed descent from the sun,[5] this story rankles, as it belittles their glorious ancestor and favors the artisan category.

Another myth links the artisans to architecture, this time to the master builder Maya. Maya once took refuge in a forest, but Agni (fire) wished to eat up the trees. Krishna tried to aid Agni by throwing his fiery discus. Maya had to flee from the flames. Sensing Krishna's involvement, Maya called out to him as a devotee would. As a result of his prayers, Krishna spared Maya's life. In this story, just as in the

previous one, the artisan counteracts violence and heat with reason and strategy, not physical force. Artisans in India are generally thought to control heat, specifically the heat of their workshop fires. They are also proud of their relatively restrained, nonviolent lifestyle. Warriors, by contrast, are strongly associated with violence. Anger is a heating sentiment, and warfare is a particularly hot activity. Most Kshatriyas eat meat in order to boost their strength, virility, and generally "hot" tempers.

The artisans in the Brothers story share in this larger tradition of Vaisya opposition to Kshatriya-style violence. Note, however, that this issue occupies a more central role in this local epic than it does in the *Mahābhārata*. Furthermore, the local story depicts certain subtle but important shifts in artisan values. Now such men are cowardly as well as cunning. In the Brothers' adventures the artisans are best known for using deceit. They feign a fall from a temple cart, for example, and manufacture a counterfeit gold vessel. When they do attempt to use force, they end up either hurting themselves or running away from danger. All in all, then, the local epic does not paint a very generous picture of the motivations of artisans. It does, however, perpetuate the larger tradition of fierce rivalry between the Kshatriya and Vaisya classes. Thus two types of varna opposition are important in the Brothers story, whereas in the *Mahābhārata* the Brahman/Kshatriya opposition alone has primacy. What is more important, a Kshatriya bias clearly dominates the entire Brothers story,[6] while in the *Mahābhārata*, the treatment of these several communal groups is much more evenhanded.

Dumézil argues that the three varna categories are represented by the Pāṇḍava sibling set and suggests that the following understructure can be extracted from contrasts between the five heroic brothers of the *Mahābhārata*:[7]

The Pāṇḍava brothers	*Symbolic social category*	*Associated functions*
Yudhisthira (the eldest)	Brahman	Religious and moral
Bhīma and Arjuna (the middle brothers)	Kshatriya	Political and military
Nakula and Sahadeva (the youngest brothers)	Vaisya	Productive and sustaining

It is not difficult to see a similar organization in the sibling set of the Brothers story. Clearly, the elder twin behaves like a Brahman, while the younger is Kshatriya-like. And the sister, the youngest of the triplets, bears links to Vaisya functions. As a female, she is a source of magical blessings for her superiors. Symbolically, she controls the family's reproductive potential. In both the sibling issue and the occupational domain there is some parallelism, but there is also a shift of emphasis. Vaisya-linked roles are more salient in the local epic's agricultural context.

The varna hierarchy that the Brothers story contains also includes a fairly obvious set of color associations. The name of the elder twin (Ponnar) is linked to the word for gold *(pon).* Indeed, this name can be taken to mean "the golden one." The name of the younger twin (Cańkar) suggests a white conch shell (cańku), an instrument of war in ancient India. Each of the Pāṇḍava brothers carried one in battle.[8] Various other magical figures are linked to conch shells in Indian folklore, one being in a popular tale from a far-away Bengal. The sister's name, Parvati, carries no similar color associations, but Pārvatī, her divine counterpart, is commonly thought to be red. The human sister carries a ball of fire in her breasts, which might be said to "redden" her. Young, beautiful women are generally linked to this color. Finally, there is the First Minister, who is described as black, a color commonly associated with untouchables. Furthermore, it is his job to care for the heroes' blue-black horses.

To the three main varna categories—Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaisya—which reflect the structure of the local sibling set, let us now add a fourth and final varna, Shudra. In a wide sense, Shudra refers to all those who are not "twice-born," in other words, not part of the higher classes of society. The Brothers' First Minister (technically an untouchable and thus outside the varna system) fits into this slot, when it is defined this way.

Classical varna	*Local hero*	*Associated color*
Brahman	Elder twin	Gold
Kshatriya	Younger twin	White
Vaisya	Younger sister	Red
Shudra	First Minister	Black

Traditionally, the color coding of the four varnas has been Brahman —white, Kshatriya—red, Vaisya—gold, and Shudra—black.[9] Al-

though the Brothers story maintains some of these basic color associations, it also inverts these classical linkages in an interesting manner. White, which elsewhere ranks highest, is assigned to the younger brother in this account. White is similarly associated with Arjuna, who ranks as a junior brother in the *Mahābhārata.* A name like Caṅkar can also connote Shankar, or Lord Śiva, though local tradition does not interpret it thus. That would provide a nice complementarity in the twins' divine linkages, since the elder brother's royal status and golden color link easily to Vishnu. In such a perspective the sister then becomes Durga-Kālī, the red warrior goddess, who joins these two gods (according to Southern tradition) as kinswoman to both.[10]

TWINSHIP

The fact that the two Brothers of the local epic are twins is also significant. Ward finds that male twins are a recurrent element in the literature of many Indo-European groups. He shows that twins regularly have different temperaments, one being more vigorous and warlike than the other; a father who is a sky god; a sister who is a daughter of the sun; and a close association with horses.[11] These four features also characterize the Brothers. The younger twin is the warlike one, while the elder is contemplative and restrained. Both are "born" on an order from Śiva, who places their spirits in a heroine's womb. The twins' sister, as if to affirm her links to the sun, carries a "fire ball" in her breast. In a prior life she is said to have served in the court of the sky god Indra, a divinity who has numerous sun associations. And finally, of course, the twins are great horsemen.

In Indian tribal folklore twins are often associated with populating the world. It is sometimes said that women used to give birth to pairs of offspring in order to speed the process of procreation. But now that mankind has become established, such excessive fertility is no longer needed.[12] In an episode in Vaisnavite mythology, the goddess Diti (Devahuti's sister), is so overcome with lust that she catches hold of her husband's clothing in the manner of a shameless prostitute. As a consequence, Diti gives birth to twin demons.[13] A well-known epic about Gugga, popular in North India, is about a hero's struggle against twin enemies.[14] If extreme lust can lead to the birth of demon twins, could it be that the extreme penance practiced by the heroes' mother "caused" her to bring forth divine ones? The "twinning"

principle, in sum, seems to be a deeply imbedded pan-Indian folk tradition. It is always linked to an excess, either of good or of evil qualities.

Another aspect of twinship which is structurally significant in the Brothers story, concerns the heroes' father and grandfather. The latter is a man of forceful action though he is weak when it comes to moral judgements. He succeeds in making his crops grow but only with Vishnu's help. He is first duped by jealous cousins into using infertile seeds. Then he makes another great mistake. Under the law he is obliged to feed a group of seven cows that had been left to wander, as they had been set loose from another kingdom during a famine. Instead he quickly erects a protective fence topped by iron spikes. The very next night the sacred cows jump this barrier and unwittingly impale themselves. The grandfather then becomes morally responsible for their deaths.

The second-generation ruler cuts a very different figure. Kunnuṭaiya is a devout and contemplative man. He never harms a living thing. But this particular gift has its own opposing flaw. He is too weak to defend himself and so is twice banished from his lands by clan rivals. If the king of the first generation was effective but too hasty with important decisions, his son is too careful. The latter is thus unable to defend his kingdom.

The heroic Brothers combine these opposite strengths of their male ancestors. Several desirable (but contradictory) qualities are much needed in a king. The *Mahābhārata* depicts several generations of rulers who have distinct personalities, too, but the Brothers story does more to develop the logical possibilities inherent in this multigenerational format. It uses this framework to its own advantage, highlighting the keen dilemma a warrior faces in dealing with the pan-Indian respect for nonviolence. Twins provide a structurally perfect solution to this otherwise difficult situation.

THE ENEMIES

Let us now look at the formal properties of the heroes' enemies. The *Mahābhārata* focuses on a central rivalry between agnatic cousins over a question of succession. Who is to inherit and rule the family kingdom? In the *Mahābhārata,* Dhṛtarāṣṭra must raise the sons of his younger brother, Pāṇḍu. When his nephews come of age, Dhṛtarāṣṭra nominates the eldest (Yudhisthira) as his successor. This decision

is acceptable in terms of traditional inheritance laws, but it leads to great jealousy on the part of his own eldest son, Duryodhana. Finally Dhṛtarāṣṭra is forced to change his mind and divide his kingdom between the two men, giving each a separate territory and capital. Duryodhana is still not satisfied, since he considers himself the rightful heir to his father's entire kingdom. As a result he plots against Yudhisthira and his four younger brothers. Eventually there is war between these cousins. No one is entirely victorious, but Yudhisthira's grandson (Parikshit) finally inherits the remains of the kingdom.

Thus, the great war in the *Mahābhārata* is fought over the question of whether a king's right to appoint a successor (from within the agnatic lineage) supercedes the right of his eldest son to inherit that position. In the Brothers story there is a similar dilemma: the Chola king grants one set of fields to the eldest of nine brothers and a second area to the other eight. The latter are disgruntled about an implied inequality in the division of this wealth. They await their chance to force a reallocation of territory. When the eldest brother dies, leaving a single infant son, the uncles take over. They disown their nephew and force him off the land. In the *Mahābhārata* the followers of Duryodhana number 100 and the Pāṇḍavas only five. In the local epic, similarly, the enemies have 1,000 representatives who challenge one set of twins. Viewed symbolically, 100 and 1,000 are similar numbers. The principle is the same. Quantity on the enemy side is contrasted with small numbers and special magical properties on the other.[15]

In both epics, another major threat comes from relatively uncivilized, even semihuman groups. There is a resemblance between the Yaksas, Rākshasas, and Nagas of the Kamyaka forest and the Vēṭṭuvas of the Vīramalai hills. Each of these groups has dietary habits inferior to those of the heroes[16] and each seems to have some kind of special relationship to forest animals.[17] In both stories the enemies encountered in the forest play a part in some larger moral scheme (which is only dimly outlined). Such battles with the uncivilized do not center on inheritance or other intraclan jealousies.[18] Furthermore, the gods always seem to come to the aid of the enemy in these oddly ritualistic scenes. Indra comes to the aid of the Nagas,[19] while Vishnu, himself, leads the Vēṭṭuva forces. In both epics, such battles have to do with the heroes' unwitting involvement in divine concerns.

EXILE

It is also interesting to look at the theme of exile in the *Mahābhārata* and in the Brothers story. In the former, this motif appears in three places: when Duryodhana entices his cousins into a palace made of lac, burns it down, and then forces the heroes to escape to the forest; when Arjuna breaks a covenant with his elder brother concerning the privacy of relations with their joint wife, Draupadī, and then goes into voluntary exile for twelve years; and when the Pāṇḍavas lose a dice game and suffer a twelve-year exile plus one further year of concealment as a result. It is during these three periods of exile that the Pāṇḍavas encounter Rākshasas and other nonhuman forces.

In the local epic, too, one can easily speak of three periods of exile: when the heroes' father is a child his parents die, and his agnatic cousins take over, forcing the boy to wander far from home, alone; when he is again ostracized, just after his marriage, because he is not recognized as an eligible groom; and when, after years of marriage, his wife (publicly) delivers only one daughter, and the couple are forced into exile because they have not produced a rightful heir. In each case the first exile involves the destruction of the heroes' palace, while the second relates to improprieties involving sex and marriage. The third stems from some direct act of deceit: In the *Mahābhārata,* the Kauravas, and in particular Śakuni, cheat the Pāṇḍavas at dice. In the local story, the deceit occurs in a birth scene, when a corrupt midwife is paid by the heroes' cousins to ensure that no male heirs survive. However, a goddess rescues the baby twins and spirits them off to a hiding place. The schemers claim the land temporarily, but eventually the heroes make their entry on the scene.

In the *Mahābhārata* it is during the Pāṇḍavas' own periods of exile that the heroes encounter Rākshasas, Nagas, and other semihuman beings. In the local epic it is the parents of the heroes who experience the three periods of exile. Their children later fight the forest enemies who gave their parents trouble during that banishment. By separating these two events in time, the Vēṭṭuva war gains much more prominence in the local epic than the counterpart struggle with anomalous beings enjoys in the *Mahābhārata.* The reason for this difference is perhaps that the Vēṭṭuvas are still an important rival community for the Kavuṇṭar Vēḷāḷars today. The Rākshasas and Nagas, at best, represent faint memory traces of early tribes that

inhabited the fringes of civilization during the an early epic period. The potential for linking this forest danger theme to contemporary social experience is thus seized upon and exploited by the local account.

THE HEROIC LIFE CYCLE

Despite these important differences between the lives of the local Brothers and the lives of the Pāṇḍavas, there is still much that they share. The two local heroes have much in common with the life histories of other Indo-European epic figures. Jan de Vries has summarized the traits of the typical hero. His scheme is duplicated here in condensed form. "A," "B," and "C" should be read as alternate possibilities.

The Indo-European Heroic Life Cycle[20]

1. A. The mother of the hero is a virgin.
   B. The father of the hero is a god.
2. A. The birth of the hero is physically "unnatural" in some way.
3. A. The young child is exposed or abandoned by its parents.
   B. The young child is fed by animals.
   C. The young child is found by shepherds.
   D. The young child is raised by a mythical figure.
4. A. The hero reveals his strength, courage, or other peculiar features at an early age.
5. A. The hero acquires some kind of invulnerability.
6. A. The hero fights with a dragon or other monster.
7. A. The hero wins a maiden after overcoming great dangers.
8. A. The hero makes an expedition to the underworld.
9. A. The hero is banished from his realm but returns to become victorious over his enemies.
10. A. The hero often dies young.

The twin brothers of the bardic variants of the local epic stand up to all ten of these pan–Indo-European predictions very well. Each criterion is met by them in some way or form, although in a few cases there is an exceptional "fit." De Vries's first prediction, that the mother of the hero be a virgin and the father a god, accurately describes the situation of the local twins. They are the reincarnation of two Pāṇḍava brothers, whose spirits Śiva inserted into a lemon for their mother to swallow. Hence she is not "normally" impregnated.

The physiological father of the heroes is either Śiva, himself, and/or two "spirits" drawn from a heavenly resting place by his hand. The heroes' birth is physically "unnatural": The twins step fully formed from their mother's womb, helped by Vishnu, who performs an invisible Caesarean.

In line with the third stage in the life cycle, the twin heroes are "stolen" at birth by the goddess Cellāttā. She raises them in an underground tunnel and feeds them tiger's milk.[21] Finally, at the age of five, the boys are taken to a stable where their parents are living in exile. Their human mother and father have a hand-to-mouth existence at the time, though they are not specifically shepherds. (The father of the boys did tend cattle for many years, however, during an earlier exile.)

In the fourth stage the hero reveals his strength at an early age. The twins fulfill this criterion by stepping out of their mother's womb carrying swords, and the younger twin immediately straightens a hump in a local midwife's back with a few well-placed kicks. In most versions of the epic, the twins are never scarred in a battle. Instead, Vishnu must finally "wound" one of them by shooting a special arrow that carries away a single small thread. Then, left less than perfect, the two Brothers decide to commit suicide and fall forward on their own great war swords. The heroes' invulnerability to others' weapons is never explicitly described, but it does appear that they have been fated to die only after receiving a special sign from Vishnu.

The sixth specification is that the hero fight a dragon or other monster. A war with a great black boar constitutes a central episode in the twins' life. The animal is 60 feet high and 70 feet long. He is said to have been born with a ring of flowers on his tail and a garland of holy basil leaves on his navel. This great boar is a diviner who consults almanacs, and he bears the mark of a star on his tongue.

For the seventh criterion the hero must "win" his wife after a superhuman effort has been expended to "capture" her. In the local epic it is the twins' mother who goes to great lengths to obtain proper spouses for her sons. She braves many dangers before she succeeds in turning two appropriate girls to stone to await a time when her sons agree to marry. The twins themselves are exceptionally uninterested in this marriage affair. Indeed, they resist the eventuality and refuse even to hold little fingers with their brides (a key aspect of the local wedding ritual).[22] The two brides are then quickly locked in a castle and never see their husbands again.

Prediction seven, then, fits mainly by the extraordinary way in which it is reversed. Instead of winning their wives with great feats of heroism, the twin heroes remain unusually passive. They avoid even the faintest overtones of sexual involvement and leave the heroism involved entirely to their mother. The resulting wedding is extraordinary in that a complete renunciation of sexual prowess replaces the requirement of its excessive demonstration. This unusual stratagem preserves every ounce of the heroes' virility for battles to come. And the brides, too, retain their purity. Instead, their energy is converted into a special magic that the whole family can share.

There are also parallels with criterion eight, that the hero make an expedition to the underworld. At first the heroes are raised underground by a goddess; later they spend time in a deep forest on the way to capture a parrot. There they meet an important magical challenge and kill thousands of tigers and cobras. Later, the elder twin dives into a deep tank and swims against the current through a dangerous sluice gate as a test of his truthfulness. He comes through with flying colors, aided by the god Vishnu. Stage nine, banishment, is also met by the Brothers' experiences. The twins are first united with their parents in a foreign territory during the latters' exile. Later they win back their own country from their rival cousins; and finally they banish the usurpers permanently.

The tenth stage is untimely and early death. The twins of the Brothers story are fated to die at sixteen, as was Abhimanyu, one of Arjuna's best-known sons. Furthermore, their demise can be called unnatural in at least three senses: They die by their own hands; the younger hero dies first (this little twist adds a certain poignancy to the story, of course, since the more natural—and culturally appropriate—occurrence would be for the elder to die first and be mourned by the younger); and they are later revived by their sister. Thus the main figures of the Brothers story lead surprisingly normal Indo-European heroes' lives. Either these general principles of epic story construction are universal or they were already present in the cultural milieu in which the composers of this local account developed their work.

THE HEROES' LINKS TO THE GODS

The characters of the local epic mirror relationships among several Hindu gods. Four major divinities have a role in shaping the heroes'

and the heroines' lives: Vishnu, Śiva, Lakshmī, and Pārvatī. These figures constitute the two major married pairs in the Hindu pantheon, and they are usually associated with a major sectarian split. Some Hindus say that Śiva and Pārvatī are superior, while others argue that this honor belongs to Vishnu and Lakshmī. Perhaps because of this rivalry, the two pairs are not normally connected by kinship bonds in the pan-Indian mythological context. In the folk traditions of Tamilnadu, however, Vishnu and Pārvatī are frequently described as brother and sister. This sibling bond is common knowledge to the peasants of the Kongu area and is important to an understanding of the Brothers story.

In developing a description of divine "participation" one may start with the fact that the twins are linked to Vishnu. They refract his multiple essence as a pair of beings who are differentiated but always move together. The theme is not unique to this story, but is a principle found in a number of Vaisnavite traditions. The commonest form of Vishnu, a male pair, can be found in stories of Krishna and his brother Balarāma. Interestingly, these two are nearly always linked with a third sibling, their sister (Subhadrā).[23] Other sets of Vishnu doubles are Nara and Nārāyana;[24] the Ásvins; Nakula and Sahadeva; and Rāma and his half brother Laksmaṇa, in the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

Although the structuring of the local epic around a pair of Vaisnavite males is not an accident, no direct references to the two heroes as forms of Vishnu are found in any of its versions. However, several printed illustrations of the story imply by the use of forehead markings that the heroes are at least allied with Vishnu. Their names, Ponnar (gold) and Cańkar (conch shell), also suggest ritual traditions linked to Vishnu worship. Vishnu, of course, is active in helping the heroes throughout the story. He is often referred to as Māyavar by the bard, and he clearly shares a special bond with the twins. Indeed, they are explicitly his devotees.[25]

If the twin heroes can be seen as earthly forms of Vishnu, then their sister is even more clearly a manifestation of Pārvatī. In Tamil tradition Vishnu and Pārvatī are explicitly thought of as siblings. In many versions the sister is the youngest of Indra's seven palace maids (the Kannimār),[26] women who are all linked, in a general way, to the goddess Pārvatī. Furthermore, the sister is called Parvati.[27] The following song sung about her is typical. It is found at several points in Rāmacāmi's story.

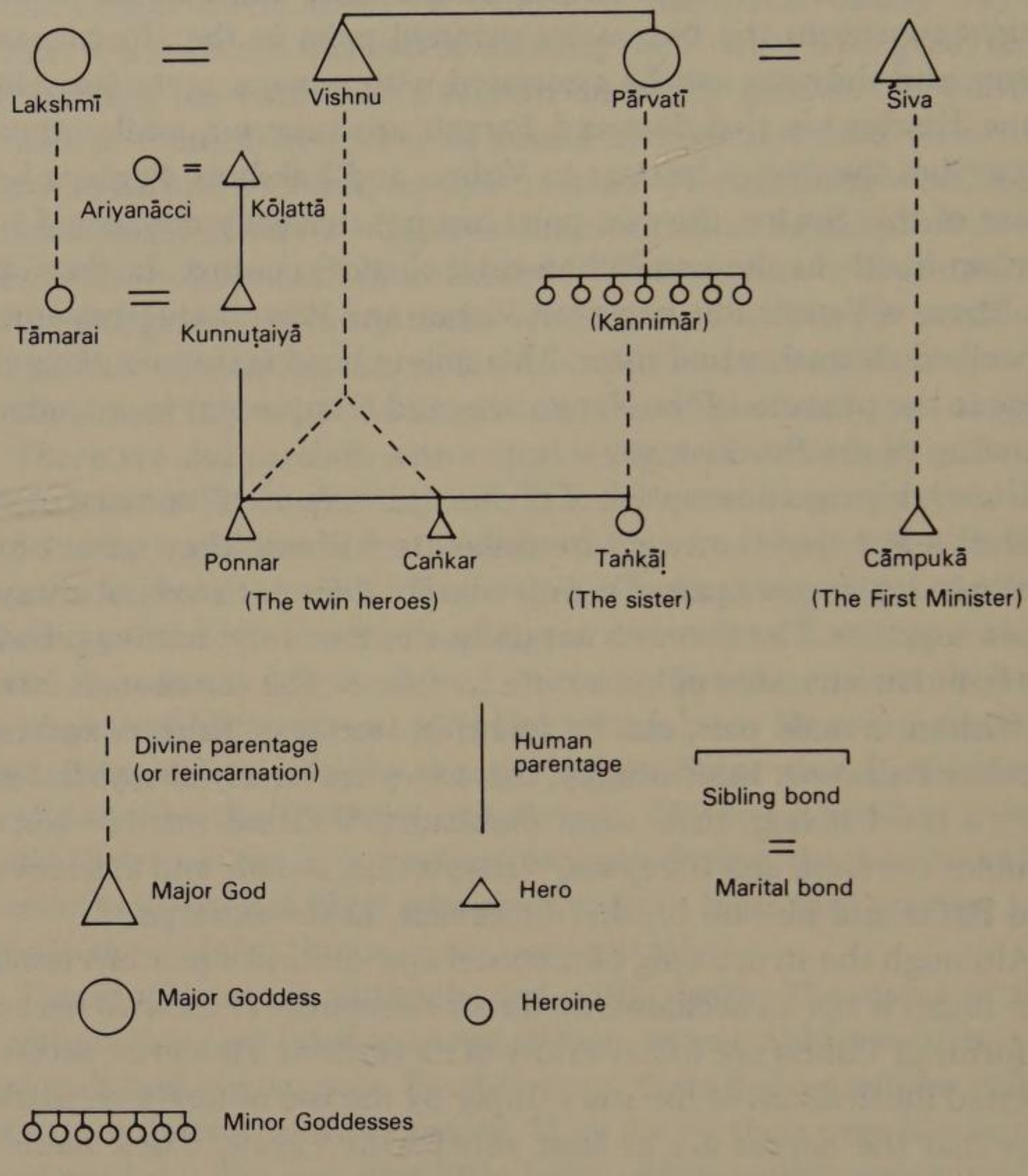


CHART 18. The Divine Dimension of Various Epic Characters.

The swing of the chaste girl is rocking
It moves for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess)
The silver chariot is swaying for the chaste girl
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess)
The swing is talking to the chaste girl
See how she smiles, the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess)
Oh chaste girl in a fine swing
Parvati is sleeping deeply.

Later, near the end of the epic it becomes still clearer that Taṅkāḷ is really a goddess. She takes on a destructive, angry aspect after her brothers die. For example, a group of potters fall before her when they find her seated at the Ganesh temple:

They are paying obeisance
They are paying obeisance there
They are offering their services to the chaste woman
They are offering (them) there
They are throwing themselves at her feet
They are offering their services to the chaste girl
They are offering (them there)

Circling around in place, they prostrated themselves before the sun[28]
Coming close, they then raised their hands and paid their respects to the goddess.

In addition to the Vishnu/Pārvatī pair, which is popular in Tamil folk tradition and is echoed in the brother/sister bond of this local epic, there is evidence for several lesser divine bonds. In the *Mahābhārata,* Draupadī is taken to be an incarnation of Lakshmī, the wife of Vishnu; in the Brothers story it is the mother of the heroes who is linked to this goddess. In traditional iconography Lakshmī is intimately identified with the lotus, and in literature she is often called by a lotus name (Padma). Similarly, the mother of the local heroes is named Tāmarai (lotus) and is said to have been born magically on a lotus leaf. A still more direct association is made in the following praise-song to Tāmarai:

Powerful Lakshmī, sweet one
Fulfilling her title, she reigns, she reigns,
she reigns there
Silver-fingered authority, sweet one
As a solitary dignity she reigns, sweet ruler
It rains three times a month, it rains there
Once a year it pours, there it pours

This song not only links Tāmarai with Lakshmī but also attributes to her a similar range of magical powers. Each has the ability to induce great prosperity and well-being, and both women are extremely beautiful.

In the local epic Tāmarai takes an important trip to heaven and does penance there for 21 years. Following Vishnu's instructions, she

leaves her husband behind and follows Vishnu, alone. This action supplies a possible erotic overtone to their friendship. Furthermore, after her period of penance in heaven, Tāmarai comes back pregnant. Now Vishnu helps her to return to earth and also brings her earthly husband back to life. Although Tāmarai is officially impregnated by Śiva (in an asexual fashion), Vishnu is certainly her real companion and benefactor during this period. It is as if Vishnu, in an earthly form as her husband, Kunnuṭaiya, is temporarily put to sleep so that a divine counterpart can take over. The links between Kunnuṭaiya and Vishnu, meanwhile, though vague, are not entirely lacking. The former is born under a pile of rocks on the latter's initiative. Though Śiva is always the formal life-giver and life-taker in this epic, Vishnu has a much-fuller and more-complex role in many of its key events. He is a companion, helper, and trickster in varied scenes throughout the whole account.

The final divine figure is Śiva. Just as he enters the action explicitly only at a few points, so too are his links to the heroes' First Minister infrequent but tantalizing. Cāmpukā, of course, is an untouchable, a social role with which Śiva has some mythological involvement.[29] In one classical myth, Śiva sets off to the forest with a dog.[30] Cāmpukā also sets off to the forest with dogs at one point in the local epic. Śiva wears snakes on his body, while Cāmpukā uses snake skins to make bridles and stirrups for his masters' horses. Cāmpukā is also able to kill or control thousands of forest cobras. He can move at tremendous speeds, carry enormous weights, and drink huge quantities of liquor. His abilities suggest that he has special divine backing.

Other aspects of Cāmpukā's role link him with the monkey king Sugrīva in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Both are low in social position but are key allies of the epic's main hero(es). Hiltebeitel links Sugrīva and his brother Vālin to drums, drunkenness, sacrifice, animals, and a general sense of tribal or "barbaric" sacred power.[31] The same can be said for Cāmpukā on all five counts. What Hiltebeitel points to as "the connection between the king and the 'wild man' of the forest . . . made to the advantage of the king" is a theme clearly present in the Brothers story as well[32] (see discussion of the sacrifice of a great forest boar in chapter 7).

Many of the overtones linking Cāmpukā and Śiva run through a third character, Aśvathāma. In the two bardic versions of the epic, Cāmpukā is explicitly described as a reincarnation of this well-known *Mahābhārata* hero, a fighter well versed in various kinds of weapons.

Aśvathāma, as already noted, was a Brahman in that great epic, but becomes an untouchable (Paṟaiyā) in his local reincarnation. Aśvathāma also changes sides. In the *Mahābhārata* he fights with the Pāṇḍavas' enemies, but in the Brothers story his reincarnation, Cāmpukā, is loyal to the heroes. Both transformations suit the character of Śiva, a trickster and an unpredictable divinity, who loves to test the limits of social propriety.

To confirm these associations between Śiva and Cāmpukā, one need only recall that Śiva was once linked to Aśvathāma by entering his body at birth.[33] Aśvathāma wears a snake emblem on his forehead,[34] just as Śiva wears snakes on his body. Aśvathāma is so strongly associated with horses that when he was born there was a great neighing sound from heaven, and the earth shook. Cāmpukā is not linked to the sound of neighing, but he does spend a great deal of time caring for and bridling horses whose hooves are said to make the earth tremble. In all these ways, the First Minister can be linked to Aśvathāma and to Śiva himself.

THE GODS AS GODS

Another important group of characters in the local epic are the gods, as gods. Since any divine figure is a kind of eternal being, such figures can manifest themselves at different times and places in human experience without having to undergo the mechanics of rebirth. Vishnu (as Māyavar), for example, demonstrates his physical closeness to the heroes throughout the story. In many scenes the Brothers and their close relations call upon Māyavar in prayers. Vishnu is able to "hear" these calls for help and is aroused by them. The mother of the twins calls upon Vishnu to help with the first harvest that she and her husband make. Because the field is so large, the couple cannot finish breaking off the heads of grain, even after receiving some assistance from local villagers. Tāmarai, therefore, takes her basket and sits down on a little hillock (of grain) facing north. There she cries out:

> Vishnu, creator of the earth
> Creator of forms, owner
> Rescuer of people in trouble, orphan-saver
>
> Can we, two people, break off so many head (of grain)?
> You must come and assist us, oh ruler of Conjeepuram!

Vishnu hears her plea, realizes he is needed, and immediately mounts his bird vehicle. Then the bard sings:

> Leaving the milk sea
> Vishnu is coming
> Searching for the earth
> Vishnu is coming
> Searching for the Country Where the Kāveri Flows
> He is coming, our Vishnu

Arriving at the hillock, Vishnu remains invisible. When he throws some sacred ash, 5,000 head of grain fall off their stalks at one go. In half a second, according to the bard's account, the hillock of grain is threshed.

However, in less-simple matters, such as the birth of a new being, Śiva must always be consulted. Vishnu necessarily is subordinate to Śiva in such life-and-death matters. In order to obtain a boon for new life, Vishnu must go to Śiva and attempt to intercede with him on behalf of his devotees. Only Śiva decrees when and how such childless penitents will obtain offspring. And only he can arrange for the sister of the heroes to talk with her brothers after their death.[35] Vishnu, therefore, often plays the role of go-between. He puts himself in the position of begging Śiva for something. Śiva, meanwhile, is usually preoccupied. He gets angry when he is disturbed. In this sense Śiva is portrayed as unsympathetic to human pathos and suffering, while Vishnu is a god of compassion.

Nonetheless, Śiva is open to persuasion. He does listen to pleading from his close relatives, and he does act when he feels "burnt" by the rigorous penance practices of humans seeking his boons. Such penance, when done properly, creates a kind of fiery force that reaches directly into Śiva's heaven and irrevocably disturbs him. This force seems, concretely, to be smoke or heat rising from the penitent's sacrificial fire. But sincere penitents also create competition for Śiva, the greatest of all ascetics. Thus the burning sensations Śiva is said to feel may also stand, metaphorically, for his "feelings" of jealousy.

Finally, brothers-in-law are also expected to have a kind of joking relationship. Thus, Śiva bargains with Vishnu and keeps two of his magical objects as security when agreeing to let the heroic twins be born on earth. While Śiva holds these objects, no human performs penance, nor does Vishnu ever ask a favor. The moment after the

Brothers' death, however, Vishnu returns their spirit lives to heaven. Śiva now returns the magical conch and the little box he has kept from Vishnu as security.[36] Then, Śiva again becomes accessible to penitents. Remember too, that Cāmpukā is born with the heroes. He is active on earth during the period that Śiva is unreachable. His and Śiva's complementary presences imply that one is somehow the other, in disguise. But on earth Cāmpukā has a subordinate role, as First Minister serving the Brothers. Here, then, a form of Śiva is temporarily subordinated to a form of Vishnu. This inversion of ranking etiquette can also be viewed as a further form of in-law "joking" behavior.

In the family scheme outlined above, Vishnu can be understood to be a bride-giver and Śiva a bride-receiver. Śiva is in the superior position, since according to general Indian tradition, a wife-giver must play the humble role. A brother-in-law should always be circumspect in visiting his affines. In local tradition, a brother may visit his sister's husband's home, but his reception should not be lavish or formal. In the local epic Vishnu visits Śiva several times, yet he always takes the subordinate role. Vishnu always comes on "business" and does not stay long. In addition to visiting rights, a brother-in-law may also request favors. In particular, he is expected to have special access to his sister's ear. In keeping with this custom, Pārvatī is the go-between. She relays messages and obtains the special favors from her husband for her brother's sake. Hence the behavior of the gods nicely reflects kinship customs locally practiced on earth.

This inversion of the standard hierarchical relationship between Vishnu and Śiva, during the period that these twin heroes are on earth, helps to accent the central role of the former in this story. Nonetheless, it is also the temporary exception that proves a more-general rule. Śiva is the supreme god in the local epic, just as he is in Tamil ballad literature generally. Even when a story is told about Rāma or Krishna (well-known forms of Vishnu), Śiva retains his place as Supreme Being.[37] Śiva and Vishnu have similar complementary roles in the *Mahābhārata;* again, Śiva deals with the cosmic issues and Vishnu with more-immediate events.[38] In this final respect, the local story exhibits a strong continuity with both a larger regional corpus of stories and a set of pan-Indian epic structures.

In both of India's classical epics the heroes are also linked with Vishnu. Arjuna of the *Mahābhārata* and Rāma of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* are both famous forms *(avatars)* of this great god. More generally,

Vishnu provides the model for all kings. All royal personages are linked to him in some way through material splendor and the embodiment of earthly power.[39] Vishnu is also a great warrior and is often seen in the story as a victor in gory battles. This divine behavior links well to the younger Brother's own involvement with war in the present story. Such traditional manifestations of divinity in human experience also provide a base for the devotional *(bhakti)* worship of the local story heroes that accompanies most retellings. Śiva, by contrast, is always portrayed as the outsider, an ascetic and a very distant or frightening god. Sometimes he is unkempt or even takes the form of a death-dealing outcaste. Hiltebeitel sees this pervasive complementarity as having governed Hinduism's two greatest gods since the very earliest period of India's cultural history.[40] A similar balance between these divine figures is forcefully present in the Brothers story.

The bards of the Brothers story have not accepted India's pan-cultural hierarchies uncritically, however. Instead they have reworked them in a way that displays a cluster of contrasting sentiments especially favored by a localized and largely rural audience. In this regional setting a Kshatriya value system dominates, while a more-balanced view of several competing varnas is present in pan-Indian literature. In the local milieu, family and personal honor are given great importance. Physical force and self-assertion are valued more highly than are nonviolence and dutiful subservience. This reshaping of high status, pan-Indian attitudes to suit local tastes can also be seen in the epic's special ritual structure, which implies that death can be conquered through personal self-sacrifice. This pattern links the Brothers' adventures to a local tradition of hero worship. The bards who tell the story see the expression of Brahman these ideals in the great temples around them, just as they hear about them through the medium of the *Mahābhārata.* Hence this regional legend does not reveal gaps in their cultural education; on the contrary, it serves as a monument to local ingenuity. In constructing a local account these bards have reassessed larger Indian ideals and reshaped them for regional consumption.

SIX
Actions and Events

An epic account provides more than a description of a particular hero's adventures. Usually the story's more-detailed passages also provide a kind of "texture," adding both color and background organization to adventure-oriented incidents. Such passages reveal the various assumptions made by a story's composers about the general milieu in which the heroes move.

KINGLY DEPORTMENT

As in most epic stories, the twin brothers of the local account live in a palace. Though they are forced to leave their grand home from time to time, the action of the story is centered around their family abode. One of the heroes' main concerns is to defend the palace and its lands from attack. Here is the description of the great home that Kunnuṭaiya Kavuṇṭar built and later passed on to his sons:

> For every thousand stones that the stone masons laid, Vishnu also laid a thousand (without being seen). In this way, within three months, the audience hall, the jewelled hall, the soldiers' outer courtyard, the reading and writing room, the school room, the theater hall, the dressing room, the cash storeroom, the treasury, the bathing area, the kitchen, and the armory were all completed.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra has a similar palace, built to his specifications, in the *Mahābhārata.* It is said to have had 1,000 pillars and 100 doors, and to have been adorned with gems. That palace, similarly, is passed on to his son, Duryodhana.

Another characteristic of an epic milieu is that order and beauty generally fill the landscape around the heroes' home. In the Brothers story, this area is lush, peaceful, and prosperous. Here is a typical descriptive passage that is repeated over and over again in the local epic:

> The beautiful Country Where the Kāveri Flows
> The country that contains the town of Cilukkāmpuliyūr in its lesser division
> The country where gold springs from the earth
> A country where the elephants are tied with thick swinging ropes
> Gold multiplies in this country and is heaped like sampa paddy
> The coconuts grow and are heaped like the forthcoming sampa paddy crop
> It is time of heavy rain, of heavy rain
> There are budding, ripening tracts of paddy, tracts of paddy
> Pouring rain covers the land, heavy rain

In Indian literature the local landscape provides an outward sign of the nobility of the rulers themselves. It is also a visible statement of the abundant blessings that great men can confer on their family and on their loyal subjects.

Similar images of prosperity, so centrally associated with a description of the heroes themselves, are also extended to include the temple of the local goddess. As ultimate ruler of the land, this divine figure stands behind the local hero. She must also prosper through generous worship if the kingdom is to flourish. In the local story, the family temples stand out against the flat rice lands because of their magnificent entrances. A big gateway is a sign of a wealthy shrine. Usually, such a gate is topped with a row of sacred pots. As Tāmarai approaches her brother's fine home, the bard describes what can be seen from a distance:

> A line of five sacred pots
> See how decorative they are
> Surrounded by coconut palms and surrounded by plantain trees
> See how the mango trees and flowering bushes flourish
> There, one can see my elder brother
> Look, one can see the palace!

Regularity and abundance, then, are key themes in these descriptive passages. In a prosperous kingdom all architecture is expected to conform to certain cosmic principles of order. Traditional Indian cities and the great Hindu temples in them are generally constructed according to a concentric plan. Similarly, the local shrine is surrounded by concentric rings of coconut and plantain trees. Even the offerings set before the goddess follow a prescribed order, as regular as the sound "ting, ting" that emanates from the worshipper's bell. Such regularity in human affairs, it is implied, will call forth a corresponding regularity in the environment. Timely, well-ordered rains are seen to follow directly from the correct completion of offerings at the local temple.

"Ting, ting," he rang the bell
From below he lifted the pot of water on high
A bath of milk, a bath of honey
A bath of rose water, a bath of sacred ash
It was (all) performed properly

See how things were done for Īsvari[1]
After this it rained three times a month

Just as the desired alternation of sun and rain is seen to flow from a correct worship of the goddess, so do justice and authority flow from the king in equal measure. The just monarch must balance all his actions. He must be both gentle and decisive in turn. It is through his moderation and orderly rule that prosperity comes to such locales. A king is held directly responsible, by his actions, for that abundance.

See the monarch rule thus
Day after day, time followed time
See the good age in progress
It was said to be good, there
See how it was done with love
The king's reign was just
His commands were authoritative
The one who has a signet ring on his finger was ruling
The king ruled authoritatively
It rained at the proper times
The kataku sampa paddy prospered
It rained abundantly in that country
The milaku sampa paddy prospered
There was so much paddy that the excess was sprouting
on the threshing floor

Local bards also use a concept of sexual bivalence to express a union of opposites in a fine ruler. Consider the following description of Kunnuṭaiyā, the heroes' father:

> King Kunnuṭaiyā, as strong as summer thunder, the precious monarch, he who is like a female, he who keeps quiet, the virtuous one, the meritorious man. . . .

And when Kunnuṭaiyā is awarded his royal title he is told by the Chola king:

> "I am going to give you the topmost position. I am going to place you in a position where you are going to be a mother who sprinkles (holy) water on all the destroyed and disrupted families, and on the fifty-six divisions and the thousand revenue units. You must rule according to Manu's book, following every law (therein), with justice. You must not beat or do injustice to anyone. You should treat your people with kindness and rule the country well."

Here a great king is praised by being compared with a quiet female, a mother who is the source of all prosperity. Such comparisons do not imply that Kunnuṭaiyā is thereby less masculine. Instead, ruling figures should blend opposites, as male and female are here shown to be one. Just as the twins are united in some of the epic's praise-songs, so the great monarch is a kind of "dividual" in disguise.[2]

In the Brothers story a king's authority is marked by more than his prosperous palace and lands, however. His power is also denoted by special signs, such as his signet ring. His personal good looks are important too; thus Kunnuṭaiyā's face "shines like the sun," while his body is "covered with perfumes and musk paste." A loss of authority, a loss of insignia, and a loss of good looks generally occur together. Vishnu signals the time for the twin brothers to die by removing a thread from the chest of the younger one with a well-placed arrow. This particular thread served as both an insignia of high status and a sign of beauty. Forcibly removing it readies the hero for suicide.

In the matter of appearance, the local twins are similar to the Pāṇḍavas of the *Mahābhārata* and to many other heroes. Each is a superb physical specimen. Both the Pāṇḍavas and the local twins dress in all their finery at the time of battle. Below is a description

of the younger twin in his local palace dressingroom, preparing to face his enemies. Such preparations are seen to add to the hero's magical strength.

> Wrapping calico around the head
> Tying a turban with a nose-gay, my Lord
> Putting on, putting on various things
> Adorning himself with sweet things, my Lord
> Collecting, collecting various things
> Things for adorning one's front, my Lord
> Glittering silks
> He covers himself with (fine) things, my Lord

In the poet's eyes the heroes resemble gods when they are dressed for war:

> The Lord's adornments glittered
> See how their bodies are covered with things
> The silks glittered
> See how they resemble gods

The heroes also carry the weapons of gods. Their spears are compared to the righteous instruments of death carried by the god Yama, and their knives to the tridents of Brahmā. It is also interesting that they fight with a very formalized set of movements. This emphasis on regularity appears to be related to that in the landscape descriptions. Orderliness is very auspicious. The heroes use 32 specific postures in their fighting. The picture suggests classical dancers, who would also be adorned in grand attire to stage a battle scene.

> In front, my Lord, and in back
> He leaps like a tiger, my Lord
> With a somersault behind, with a somersault
> in front, my Lord
> Using thirty-two different postures, my Lord
> The knife, the great knife is swinging

Most of the scenes in the Brothers story are set near a palace. Scenes away from home describe the heroes and their assistants in large tracts of forested land. That is another way in which the Brothers story resembles the great epics of India. One theme, however, does set this local epic apart: its emphasis on the heroes' agricultural

holdings. Several descriptions of prosperous paddy fields have already been cited. But the storytellers go further. They see to it that the local rulers are involved directly with agricultural activities, particularly with ploughing.

This emphasis is significant, for ploughing serves as a symbol of the heroes' much wider involvement with agricultural concerns. It is also important because of the prohibition in orthodox religious texts on this activity. Orthodox Brahmans often say that ploughing is akin to killing, because one can accidentally injure creatures living in the soil. There is also a sense in which the earth itself is "torn" or wounded by such work. That the Brothers themselves hold the handle of a plough is a deliberate statement about their identity. These men are proud farmers, and they deliberately assert this fact, even if laborers actually do the hard work after a few ritual furrows have been cut. The following lines refer to the heroes' father:

> The king of the farmers held the curved plough
> The king of the agriculturalists held the ploughshare
> See the faggot bundles, see the ripe paddy.

These descriptions of ploughing parallel the actual attitudes of members of the Kavuṇṭar community in the Kongu region today. If the king is a considerate, just ruler (like a Brahman), he must also be a virile warrior (like a Kshatriya) and a prosperous farmer (like a Vaisya). In contrast to classical Hindu religious reasoning, where the Brahman ranks at the top of the social hierarchy because he is not involved with impure activities, here the hero is ranked high because he is good at many things. It is his magical touch on the plough, for example, that yields so much grain. Thus the local story uses pan-Indian religious ideas, but gives them a subtle twist that substantially alters the interpretation of the underlying status hierarchies involved.

Another subtle change concerns the introduction of the term "Kongu." It is clear from a number of geographical references imbedded in various versions that the actual locale of these story events lies just a little bit to the southeast of the Kongu area (see chapter 1). Yet the story is now told in areas that are located within the Kongu region. Local bards tend to add the term "Kongu" to their text, therefore, claiming that the heroes moved in territory that local audiences know. Thus the bards describe the Kavuṇṭar of the big house:

Holding his curved plough, he ploughs his agricultural kingdom
Holding his crooked plough, he ploughs his Kongu agricultural kingdom.

DICING

Both the great Pāṇḍavas and the local epic heroes engage in playing dice. In the *Mahābhārata* there is one major dice game, which the heroes lose. As a result they find their common wife, Draupadī, humiliated, and they are exiled from their kingdom for many years. In the Brothers story there is no one "great" dice game. Instead there are several smaller ones. The heroes of the *Mahābhārata* play dice with their cousins, the Kauravas; in the local epic, the two Brothers play with a superhuman kinsman, Lord Vishnu.

Biardeau suggests that playing dice introduces a principle of randomness into human life. In the *Mahābhārata,* she thinks, dicing expresses the fact that orderly behavior *(dharma)* is on the wane.[3] Hence the Pāṇḍavas' exile and their other problems are foreshadowed by their loss at dice. Similarly, in the Brothers story, each of the six games of dice the heroes play immediately precedes some unhappy turn of events. Each game becomes almost a formula for the introduction of a new misfortune. Immediately following the respective dicing scenes: 1. the heroes are cajoled by their mother into unwanted marriages; 2. their parents die; 3. war is declared against their rival cousins; 4. the Chola king demands back taxes in an insulting manner; 5. news is received by the younger male that the elder has been put in jail; and 6. their sister requests a parrot, which leads to a war with the Vēṭṭuvas and eventually to the heroes' death. Although these cause-effect relationships are never made explicit, playing dice in the local story clearly entails later misfortunes.

Vishnu fetters the younger hero with invisible chains each time they sit down to play. When he loses, the impetuous young man becomes angry. He manages to burst these manacles each time his ire is aroused, but their presence does slow him down. This spectacle heightens Vishnu's role as an adversary. Like Śakuni, the Kauravas' uncle in the *Mahābhārata,* the god entices the heroes into games they cannot win. The local story makes it even clearer than does the *Mahābhārata* that dicing is a way of playing with fate. It is one human contest in which no king claims ultimate victory.

In its general use of dicing scenes, the local epic is very much like its forerunner, the *Mahābhārata,* but in a detailed use of the same

imagery, the treatment is very different. Indeed, there is a kind of divine one-up-manship vis-à-vis the former story. Śiva is the dice addict in the *Mahābhārata.* In the Brothers story Vishnu becomes more active in the heroes' lives and is now the dice player. Śiva, meanwhile, becomes a serious ascetic, absorbed only in abstract thought.[4]

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

The local epic provides descriptions of the people who surround the heroes as well. Servants of these kings can be identified by their special badges and silver sticks. They walk with a distinctive gait and always carry out orders with alacrity:

> The light-footed servant, a servant
> Shining like silver, shining
> Running with big steps, big steps
> A servant is coming at great speed
>
> The watchman is coming fast like a bee, my Lord
> He walks slowly, like a swan, when he sees someone
> When he doesn't, he travels with the speed of a horse

The twins' First Minister, Cāmpukā, is a particularly important figure in the local epic. He is an untouchable by caste, yet he is exceptionally strong and courageous, in keeping with the general stereotype of low-caste males in both folk and classical literature in India. Strength and fearlessness are always thought to reside in special measure with those born onto the lowest rungs of the social ladder:

> Born of a black, black Paraiyā woman
> Cāmpukā, the sharp, rigorous one . . .
> Cāmpukā, the strong one, my God
> Traversing, traversing, he quivered
> This most courageous man of the world.

In addition to such specific roles as watchman, servant, or Minister, nine specific caste names are used in the bard's versions of the Brothers story.

Caste	*General Occupation*
Brahman	Priest
Kavuṇṭar	Farmer
Chēṭṭiar	Merchant
Kannakku Pillai	Accountant
Ācāri	Goldsmith/Stone mason
Vēṭṭuva	Forest farmer
Paṇṭāram	Flower supplier
Utaiyar	Potter
Paraiyā	Laborer

More of the references to these castes are to people doing a specific job quickly and without complaint. They are paid ceremoniously and then sent away. It is a society in which every person has a specific function in life. Services are specialized and provided on command. Just as in India's great epics, however, the main focus is always on persons belonging to the ruling class. Descriptions of the rest of the society merely show the contexts in which heroes interact with their loyal followers. These lines are typical:

> The Brahmans took the necessary materials, tied strings of mango leaves to the house, recited sacred chants, and performed a religious ceremony. Then the Brahmans were given cloths and other gifts and were sent off.

The Brothers story contains additional scenes involving the gods. Vishnu frequently appears before his devotees as an aging male ascetic. He is humble, dressed rags, and carries only a little box of sacred powders and his begging bowl. The gods use similar disguises in the *Mahābhārata,* and the generosity of Tamil saints is frequently tested in legends in which gods appear before them as ascetics. In the Brothers story, Vishnu is the great teaser. Serving as a soothsayer, for example, he reveals that Kunnuṭaiyā must invite 1,000 ascetics to a feast, but then frustrates him by producing only 999 . This theme is present elsewhere in the Tamil mythological tradition, but it is particularly stressed in this folk account.

In the *Mahābhārata* considerable space is allocated to ceremonial greetings and leave-takings, but the Brothers story goes even further in ritualizing these occasions. For example, exactly the same formula is used to describe the elder twin's greeting when he meets the Chola king and Tāmarai's greeting when she meets Śiva in his heavenly council chamber:

He paid obeisance at the king's feet
He offered him his services
He threw himself at the king's feet

She paid obeisance at the king's feet
She offered him her services
She threw herself at the king's feet

The social principle that is stressed in these greeting patterns is hierarchy. Each person has a personal overlord who is to be respected and served. Similarly, each person in authority is expected to treat his underlings with tenderness and patience, just as he would his own children. At the top of this ladder are the gods, and even they have their own internal rank order. Śiva stands at the apex of this system. He bows to no one. These respect rules define the formal relationships that govern most of the interactions in the Brothers story. They also help one understand scenes of suffering, since many of the more-violent encounters flow directly from a violation of accepted rank orders. The commonest is one in which a dependent rebels, causing the superior to erupt in blind anger. In one incident an outbreak of violence is occasioned by presumption. Kunnuṭaiyā, when an orphan, dares to ask for the hand of the daughter of a wealthy farmer, for whom he works as a shepherd.

For six hours with a whip, my Lord
They beat him with insolence, . . .
With a whip having a blunt tip, . . .
They are beating until the end breaks.

The blood is flowing, the blood is flowing
. . . And with a heavy head that was tired, the Lord fell to the earth and was unconscious.

Only Kunnuṭaiyā and the audience know that this beating is unjust. The wealthy farmer is actually the maternal uncle of the orphaned boy. That makes him a proper wedding partner.[5] But at a superficial level, the hierarchical relationship between master and shepherd was clearly violated.

Another incident concerns a refusal to submit to higher authorities. When the Chola king sends a delegation of officials to the twins, demanding unpaid tribute, the younger brother decides to refuse. Instead he turns to his sister and says:

> "Princess! I will not submit to that king while balancing a dish of curds on my head, holding a measuring vessel made of silver on my shoulder, and (bringing) gifts of food in my hands like a servant. Let him do what he likes (when) nothing is brought. I cannot go."

The Chola king responds with a series of insults and affronts, which reach a peak when the elder twin is thrown in jail. The younger sibling then orders a full-scale physical attack on the Chola overlord and finally wins outright independence.

> "Hey Cāmpukā! The Chola's palace must broken into pieces, small pieces. Man, lance that sword."
>
> The stone pillars there, my Lord
> Fell down weeping there, my Lord
> The iron pillars there, my Lord
> Fell in two pieces, my Lord
> The Chola had four wounds, my Lord
> His wife had three wounds, my Lord
> So many people, my Lord
> Have been destroyed, my Lord

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The local social hierarchy has a territorial dimension as well. War between the subdivisions of a larger entity (←→) can be likened to a civil war, but a war with outsiders (←·→) is similar to a foreign campaign (see Chart 19). The Chola king is the overlord of a large area, while the heroes rule a smaller unit subsumed under this large umbrella. The bardic versions of the Brothers story champion rebellion and glorify the independence of the underdogs in this hierarchy. In the printed versions of the story the heroes embark on their wider adventures with the backing of the Chola sovereign. In the bard's account they overthrow that ruler and conduct their foreign affairs themselves.

The political geography of the Brothers story is its middle ground. More specific than the descriptions of the various local areas are details about the heroes' family setting. At the other extreme is the cosmic dimension that describes the heroes' interactions with various gods. Taken together, these three geographies provide the local story with an impressive spatial scope and allow a comparison with the

Mahābhārata in terms of the breadth of its vision. A folk epic in Andhra exhibits a similar geographic understructure (Roghair, 1982). Any number of local Indian epic legends probably share these traits.

In the cosmic geography:

A deep sea surrounds the human world
A milk sea lies beyond that
Vishnu lies sleeping on this milk sea.
The Himalayan mountains top the world.
At their feet lie rivers of stone, thorn, butter, and fire.
Beyond these mountains lies Śiva's council chamber.
In front of that chamber is a place for performing penance.
Close to the road leading to the council chamber is a hell pit where selfish and antisocial beings are tortured.
A divine record keeper and a henchman who delivers death to human beings stay close to Śiva's side.
There is some sort of underworld where the heroes are raised by a goddess.
Vishnu traverses the great distances between worlds on his (mythical) Garuda bird.

In the local geography:

The headquarters of the kingdom lie in the town of Cirukkāmpuliyūr.
This domain is divided into 1,000 revenue units.
The area is governed by the goddess Cellāttā, of Matukkarai.
Its rulers live in a fine palace surrounded by rice fields.
There are two large irrigation tanks.
There are two fine sluice gates, one for each tank.
There is a Ganesh temple in each local settlement.
There is a walled flower garden.
There are some distant uncultivated fields used for pasturing the animals.
There is a river bank, used for bathing and as a water supply.

A fourth action arena is different from but serves to complement the three principal ones. It is the no-man's-land of the forest where the heroes go to confront their Vēṭṭuva enemies and where they eventually die. The geography of this area is not as complete as the descriptions of the other three locales. One does learn, however, that there are many mountains in the area, and that a myriad of wild animals are ready to attack. The paths in the forest are strewn with

CHART 19. War and Political Geography

Temporal relation to the heroes	Larger political unit	Local territory	Type of interaction with heroes	Epic characters' setting	Military resources
Ancestral only	Unspecified	Country of abundance		Heroes' ancestors' home	?
Contemporary	Chola territory	Country of affluence	tension	Mothers' brothers' home	?
		Country of prosperity	skirmishes	Agnatic cousins' home	?
		Country Where the Kaveri Flows	war	Heroes' own home	Men from the 1,000 revenue units
Contemporary	Unspecified	Vīrappūr Forest		Vēṭṭuvas' home	The 1,000 Vēṭṭuva chieftains

thorns, the dust is hot, and there is very little water. Somewhere in this area lies the Vēṭṭuva capital of Vīrappūr. Outside that town is the battlefield where the heroes encounter the enemy. Nearby is a river where they bathe after their struggle, and close by that is a vanni tree *(Prosopis spicigera)* and a rock outcropping on which the Brothers expire. The fact that this area is a no-man's-land lends it sacred associations, appropriate both to the heroes' death and to their later revival. The local bard explicitly compares this setting to the great Kurukshetra battleground of the *Mahābhārata;* and Roghair reports the importance of a similar ritual battleground in a popular epic from Andhra.[6] The existence of a pan-Indian tendency to revere the death sites of epic heroes seems likely.

There is also information on the army the heroes command. In their campaign against the Vēṭṭuvas, a symbolic contrast between the two sides is important. The contestants are equal in number, since each army is said to have 1,000 subleaders. But the two armies have very different internal compositions. The Vēṭṭuva force is made up of clansmen. All its warriors are relatives, and one gets a picture of a large tribe. These men are relatively equal in status, with no overall leader. Similarly, they do not control a specific country *(nātu)* in the way their rivals do, but simply "inhabit" a large forest area.

The heroes' army is a territorial one and it comprises very heterogeneous elements:

There are a crore of Muslims [10,000,000]
A crore of wrestlers
A crore of Maratta soldiers
A crore of silk weavers
And a crore of resident army men
That makes five crores of soldiers,
Plus a dog from each sheep fold
And a man from each home
Who have come without fail
With their packaged, cooked rice and large sticks
The army in cuckoo forest is ready
The army in heron valley is ready

The twins give the orders and camp in a distinctive white tent. Such contrasts, as much as any other details in the story, give one the sense of a war between castemen and tribesmen, or between two very different styles of life.

ANIMALS

There are some female animals in the Brothers story that express special humanlike feelings of insult and personal loss. But this local account is not different from the great epics of India in that regard. In the *Mahābhārata* talking swans convey messages between Nala and Damayantī, for example. But female animals have an especially important role in the Brothers story. Besides a female parrot, the heroes' sister also has a female pet dog; and her counterpart, the Vēṭṭuvas' sister, has a female pet boar. These heroic women are chaste, right down to their dealings with animals.

The femaleness of Taṅkāḷ's little dog is particularly important. She is left behind when the Brothers call their troops together in preparation for war. The dog sulks and lays a curse on the twins that will cause them to fall ill on the battlefield because they are leaving her behind. The men finally recognize their error and call the dog to join them. She then plays a key role in the battle against the boar. The huge male beast is immobilized when this tiny female (said to be no larger than a man's hand) bites its testicles. The sexual symbolism cannot be missed here, even though it has been shifted onto animals. This scene is especially loved by the local audiences, and they de-

mand that it be performed regularly. In general, the oral versions of the story celebrate the heroism of various underlings with particular zest, especially when a striking reversal of sex roles is involved.

The most-memorable female animals in the local epic are the heroes' two blue-black horses. There is clearly an association between the twins' strong emotional attachment to their horses and their equal lack of attachment to their wives. As in the previous examples, sexual themes in the Brothers story surface principally through their expression in animal roles. Several heroes celebrated in North Indian epic literature also ride black mares, and there is a widespread association of horses and twins in Indo-European mythology.[7] The following lines convey the semidivine quality exuded by the Brothers' steeds:

> Spurring with the right foot, . . .
> The horse gallops as if it will reach (Vishnu's) heaven
> Spurring with the left foot, my Lord
> See the horse gallop as if it will reach the world above
>
> See the blue horse striking the stones, . . .
> See the horse breaking a path on Karumalai mountain, . . .
> See the blue horse tramping on the grass, . . .
> See it cross the Pilaimalai mountains, . . .
> See the blue horse crush the thorns,. . . .

In all known versions of the local epic these great horses are a part of the royal paraphernalia. They are immensely loyal beasts. In one account, for example, the younger twin's mount stands over the place where its master has fallen in battle, helping his elder brother to find it. Unlike all the other pet animals in the Brothers story, however, the horses do not talk. The contrast with India's great epic literature is also quite strong. Horses draw chariots in both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa,* but no hero ever rides an individual steed in those accounts.

THE WOMEN

The several bardic versions of the Brothers story contain no descriptions of the heroines' fancy clothing. There is nothing to rival the imagery used for men, who wear nosegays on their turbans and flashing silks. Instead stress is laid on the modest demeanor that is supposed to be a habit with the women. All one knows is that they cover their bodies completely:

The fine creeper vine had an upper cloth covering
Her waist, her tender waist was unseen
Parvati wore an upper cloth, her tender breasts were unseen

Veiling herself with her sari, there
Without showing her midriff
The chaste girl veiled herself
Without showing any part of her body

Nonetheless, such women (particularly the older ones) are interested in jewelry, and they wear prestige ornaments of great variety. They also know enough about what they want in jewelry to be able to command the local craftsmen themselves. For example, when Tāmarai is preparing for a trip to her brother's home, she calls in a group of goldsmiths and asks them to make some gifts for her brother's children.

Make some diamond jewelry, oh men
Make some necklaces of coins, necklaces of coins
Make plenty of them, oh goldsmith men
Some hair ornaments, hair ornaments
Make them correctly, oh goldsmith men
Some ornaments for the hair, for the hair
Make them well, oh goldsmith men

Oh men, goldsmith!
For ten fingers, molded seal rings
For eight fingers, well-made seal rings
Make everything well and lay it aside

The women move with distinctive rhythms. Even the servants are graceful and lovely to watch. Though they do not wear insignia, the way watchmen and messengers do, the women do attend to their looks. Some use conventional make-up, darkening their eyes and decorating the center of their foreheads. Others wear jewels that resemble flower garlands.

The ladies-in-waiting have come to fetch water
They walk like swans, the ladies-in-waiting
They swing their arms beautifully, the ladies-in-waiting

The maid put a red dot on her forehead
The peahen outlined her beautiful eyes in black

The garlanded parrot lifted the water pots
The garlanded parrot, Kuppi, is coming

The most-expressive indication of the protected status of these high-class heroines is their association with indoor swings. Even today, wealthy women in this area of India frequently spend their free time sitting on pleasure-giving, moving couches. At age fourteen the heroes' sister is seen sitting in her swing:

> The cradle of the chaste girl is rocking
> See the tender puppet girl move
> The silver chariot of the chaste girl is swaying
> It moves rhythmically for the tender puppet girl
> The graceful swing sings for the eye-like jewel
> The swing flies back and forth for Parvati
> The chaste girl is in the graceful cradle-like swing
> Parvati is sleeping deeply.

These swings resemble cradles in their womblike coziness. And just as children play with puppets, so the girls are likened to dolls. A swing does the moving for them. However, these moving couches are symbolic of more than superficial pleasures and high social status. They also express the helpless, childlike quality of these women. They are dependent on male protectors and rarely leave their homes. The use of swings has an additional ritual significance in India that has only recently been appreciated.[8] Swinging is often a feature of festivals celebrated for major goddesses. Many contexts associate the swing with exhilaration, terror, and ecstacy. These religious attitudes are linked to clairvoyance and to special religious powers, qualities the heroines in this story have in abundance.

Another indication of the women's closed lives is the importance given to their marriage with cross-cousins. In each generation the key men of the story marry their mothers' brothers' daughters. Such

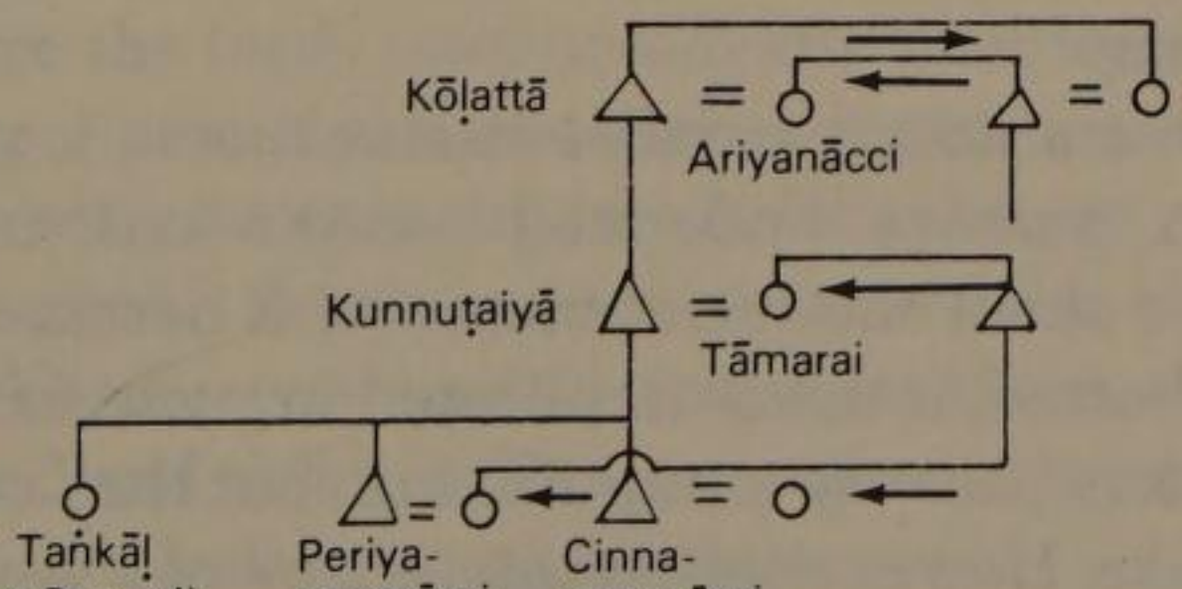


CHART 20. The Brothers' Genealogy

marriages are ritually correct and also highly desirable, according to local Kavuṇṭar custom. Hence these unions provide evidence of an impeccably correct family tree. The cross-cousin marriage pattern is important to the epic as a whole and reflects local concerns. There has been some debate over the possible importance of cross-cousin marriage in the *Mahābhārata*[9] also.

Parallel to the stress on female modesty and on a female's protected status inside her close family circle are the descriptions of enemy attempts to assault the women. This motif enjoys great prominence in the *Mahābhārata.* In that epic Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas' joint wife, is the target of several enemy attacks. She is assaulted at least three times in the course of the story. In the first instance Duryodhana wins a dicing match with her eldest husband and thereby takes Draupadī as his slave. When she refuses to sweep for him he tries to tear off her clothes. Bhīma, vowing revenge, eventually does battle with Duryodhana and smashes his thigh. In another incident he drinks the blood of Duhśāsana, who also abused Draupadī in the wake of the dice game. In a lesser-known assault on Draupadī's modesty, the prince Jayadratha calls on Draupadī when she is alone in the forest (during exile, when her husbands are out hunting). Captivated by Draupadī's beauty, he drags her off by force, though she tries to repulse him. Bhīma then drags Jayadratha from his vehicle, beats him, and shaves off all but five locks of his hair. Another incident occurs during the thirteenth year of the Pāṇḍavas' forest stay, while Draupadī is a maid at the palace of king Virāṭa. There Kīchaka, the king's brother-in-law, attempts to make love to her. Bhīma rescues Draupadī and slays her assailant, rolling his bones and flesh into a little ball. These attacks serve two ends. They are attempts to reduce Draupadī's personal honor and purity, and at the same time insult her close relatives, the heroes, who have failed to protect her fully.

In the Brothers story a parallel assault theme is present but in a subdued form, perhaps moderated because local tradition is especially sensitive about the maintenance of a heroine's chastity. The twins' sister, herself, is never implicated in such sexual attacks. The Vēṭṭuva invaders once try to capture her, but they carry off a palace maid by mistake. However, even this seizure of a woman is humiliating to the heroes, and they vow to take revenge. Later the Vēṭṭuvas try again. This time they send a note to the heroes threatening to make their sister their slave. But the Brothers attack the enemy first, and the young girl is never captured.

Similarly, the Vēṭṭuva war starts because the Brothers catch a female parrot that lives in their enemies' forest. The bird then demands that her own male protectors, the Vēṭṭuvas, take revenge. There is also the insult that the heroes' mother gives to a female boar, the Vēṭṭuvas' ally. The boar remembers this degrading experience. When her son is born, he retaliates, in his mother's name, by attacking the twins' lush paddy fields. Threats to female honor may be subtle in this local epic, but they are still important.[10]

The women in the local account consistently have better intuitions than do the men. For example, when Tāmarai's husband complains that their grain is blooming improperly in the fields, the wife, not the husband, thinks to look inside a growing stalk. There she discovers not maize but precious gems. In another instance Tāmarai realizes that Lord Vishnu is standing before her in the form of a beggar, but her husband, who is also present, fails to perceive the god's presence. In some cases women can also read omens of impending disaster: the fact that a black cat has crossed their path, that a headload has struck the beam of a door, or that a flower has wilted before its time.

This same female intuition is also shared by the story's goddesses. For example, when Vishnu arrives at Śiva's home in disguise, only Pārvatī recognizes him. Even Śiva is deceived (or at least pretends to be). Thus, where knowledge of the extraordinary is required, the women in the local epic are clearly given the edge. The very best examples of female vision involve the heroes' younger sister. On five different occasions, Taṅkāḷ is sleeping when a horrific vision suddenly descends on her, and as a result she manages to warn her brothers and save them from danger.

Metaphors and similes used to describe women extend these special female themes. For example, the heroines of this local story are frequently compared to birds, plant life, and precious gems. Parrots and peacocks are the birds most commonly mentioned in these poetic descriptions. As for plants, the main associations are with creeper-like vines or with sweet mango fruit. Women are also compared to the sun and to gold. Pearls and emeralds are also objects used for these images. When a woman is despondent there are parallel usages. A distressed and childless Tāmarai refers to herself as a sprouting weed, rotting wood, or common dust.

Each of these metaphoric conventions contains overtones that link women to divinity. The bird images are the most obvious. Birds fly upward, toward heaven. Special colors link the peacock and the parrot to the sky, and hence to the gods. Even though the peacock

does not fly well, it is further associated with the coming of the rains, in which the gods also have a hand. The peacock is a minor divinity in itself and is also a vehicle for one of the most-popular South Indian gods (Skanda or Murugan). In addition, its plumage serves as an important emblem of the god Krishna.

Male images employed in the local epic, by contrast, refer to large, four-footed animals (lions, tigers, and elephants). These creatures of the ground move about and assert their will in a very direct manner. The vegetal metaphors used for females are more passive, or even clinging (especially the references to vines and creepers). But plants also stretch upward and are sky-oriented. The vegetal world belongs to a domain of experience distant from that which humans know. Animals are much closer to people, both in their personalities and in their behavior. The object metaphors that are applied to women are interesting too. The materials referred to are beautiful because they generate (or reflect) light. Yet at the same time these things (the sun, gold, emeralds, pearls) contain a pure essence. They are the alchemist's finest and most potent substances.

The women of the local epic are also special when it comes to their encounters with death. They have the power to pass through death and to be reborn in ways that the men cannot. During her 21-year stint of penance in heaven, Tāmarai is depicted as emaciated and withered. There are bugs in her hair and parrots nesting in her nose. She has not eaten, and her braids have become fixed to the four corners of the earth. Finally, Vishnu takes pity on her. He takes her body to the Ganges River and revives it by moistening it with sacred water. After this, Tāmarai is counted as having passed through death once. To accomplish a second death Vishnu tells Tāmarai to remount her penance post. As she does so Śiva suffers from a burning sensation. Discovering the presence of a penitent in heaven, the god comments to his assistants:

> "The villain. Who brought (this woman) to the God's council chamber? Oh assistants! Pull her down and cut her into little pieces, like small shells. Put her at the bottom of three hell pits, trample on her, and then come (to me)."

No sooner is Tāmarai cut up and trampled upon, than Vishnu comes to h er aid again. This time he goes to the hell pit and fishes out three of the heroine's bones. He moistens them in the Ganges River and lays them out on a hillock. Then Tāmarai jumps up, a

whole woman once more. In all she undergoes death seven times.[11] The last time, Śiva orders that her head be cut off and planted on a stake at the gates of heaven. Vishnu is now powerless to revive her. Vishnu can revive people only if he has all the pieces. Śiva steps in at this point. His concern with her head reminds one of the special symbolic significance of this body part, seen elsewhere as the seat of life.[12]

Other women in the epic, notably the wives of the heroic Brothers, also undergo repeated deaths. One occurs before their marriage to the heroes; the second is a fiery demise forced upon them when their husbands die. All these gruesome scenes add up to one important conclusion: great heroines are able to pass through death. By doing so they merely become "purified" and invigorated in their next life. The more deaths they experience, the more refined they become. All in all, women experience death more often than do men in this epic, and they also think of suicide more often. Men's skills can cope with the world of the present. Women's abilities are more suited to understanding another world, one that lies closer to the source of human life, where the gods reside.

One further aspect of magical power that the well-bred women of this epic enjoy is the ability to transfer their blessings or curses. When the Brothers set out to capture a parrot, their sister first blesses their swords. They return victorious. But later on, when they get ready to wage war against the boar, she refuses to repeat the ritual.[13] This time the two men die in the distant forest. In this case a blessing is transferred by touch. But women can also exert their powerful influence by merely throwing a handful of fire, earth, or water. These "powers" consist of the control of basic substances. Any basic element can be used by a chaste woman to advance righteous ends.

Although very colloquial in its style and localized in geographic terms, this description of women accords well with ideas found in much of India's classical literature. There one finds the same basic theme: women are socially subordinate, yet they are potential sources of divine power. Women must submit to the control of fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. Yet chaste women are also living goddesses. They must be respected and revered. Women are well-springs of prosperity and a prime source of ongoing life. Classical Indian traditions are thus in essential agreement with the local epic in understanding the female to be a distinct "species."[14]

In general, even though the female is weaker than the male, in

certain circumstances she can exert powers quite out of proportion to her physical build. In average situations, though, her physical inferiority is very evident. When the father of the heroic twins makes his new bride walk across country with him, she soon begins to cry:

> "Husband! My two heavy feet are bleeding
> Tie me, leave me, go
> My two knees are bleeding
> My breath has left me, go
> I am thirsty for good water, husband
> Leave me to fall down, go
> I am thirsty for cold water
> Leave me to grit my teeth, go
>
> Husband! I need a handful of water for my thirst.
> Husband! My face has not seen the sun for sixteen years.
> I cannot walk," she said and lay down under a banyan tree.

Similar descriptions appear when other journeys are described. Men can become tired too, but women tire much faster.

When Tāmarai and her husband are banished from his ancestral lands, the two wander in search of shelter. They finally find a place to live in a neighboring kingdom, but they are badly in need of food. The wife learns that other women in the area are being paid to husk rice, so she turns to her husband and says:

> "Husband! The people are going to husk rice. Watch the child. I shall go, husk rice, and return."

The husband answers:

> "Oh woman! Up to now you have never even held a pestle in your hands. Therefore, can you really go and husk paddy?"

Tāmarai is determined and sets off, despite her husband's doubts. The other women refuse to take her as a husking partner. They see immediately that she is a frail lady and unaccustomed to hard work. Finally Tāmarai decides to tackle the job without a partner. She succeeds handsomely.

The most-interesting aspect of these royal women, then, is that their physical weakness is counterbalanced by their special "spiritual" strength. The most-direct expressions of this feature appear in passages when a woman is determined to care for a young child, or where a barren wife desires offspring. Consider Tāmarai's

trip to Śiva's mountain abode in hopes of obtaining children. On the way her husband tires:

Kunnuṭaiyā: "Oh, you woman of mine!

Thorns to prick an elephant, oh woman
All are stabbing my body
Thorns to penetrate a horse, (prick) me
(They) rise up to stab one

Oh, you woman, Tāmarai! My eyes do not see.
How can I walk these uninhabited wastes?"

Tāmarai: "Husband. I will hold your hand and lead you slowly.
Come without fearing."

Kunnuṭaiyā: "O.K. There is no path. We shall return home. Come!"

Bard: Stretching out her palms.
The chaste lady climbs upward
Extending her thumbs
Tāmarai is climbing to the mountain top.

The women of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also courageous and strong-willed. If there is a difference it is only one of degree. For example, Tāmarai's determination to proceed despite her husband's objections is greater than Draupadī's. The women of India's classical epics never disobey their husbands so openly.

The willingness to persevere for a cause, even when one's husband provides an obstacle, gives Tāmarai a very distinctive character. In like manner, the sister of the twin heroes insists on making her own decisions at certain key points in the story. The situation is similar when it comes to austerities. In the *Mahābhārata,* three major female figures (Kuntī, Gāndhārī, and Sāvitrī) obtain special charms or boons as a result of their devotion to their husbands, but the first two do not suffer particularly for this reward. Only the third, Sāvitrī, has to make a difficult trip (to the world of the dead). Her boon is the revival of her husband.

The bard of the Brothers story makes it quite clear that Tāmarai is not to be compared to Sāvitrī but rather to the male hero, Arjuna. It is his penance, done to obtain celestial weapons, that provides a model for her. Vishnu carefully admonishes her to stand in the very same place where Arjuna once stood. Even the physical conditions are similar. Arjuna's worship consists of sitting on kusa grass, holding

a staff, wearing a deer skin, taking only air for food after the fourth month, holding his arms straight up, and standing on the tip of one big toe.[15] Tāmarai's physical hardships are illustrated by this parallel passage:

> Vishnu: "O.K. Take off your garments and put on the saffron body cloth."
> Tāmarai: "Lord. I have put it on."
> Vishnu: "O.K. Put the bead necklace around your neck. Rub the sacred ash over your whole body." Having said this Vishnu planted seven needles on a stone with their points together. On this he placed seven victory beads, on these he placed seven glass beads, on these seven red flowers, and on these seven red oleander flowers, to make the pillar of penance. "O.K. Tāmarai. Climb this place of penance, sit with one leg folded and hanging down, close both eyes, extend both arms and meditate on Śiva with complete austerity. For twenty-one years endure the winds and rains that beat down upon you. Let (your) braids become fixed to the four corners of the ground."

Here the purpose is to obtain children. This orientation is significantly different from that of Sāvatrī, who was focused on reviving her husband. The local female thus takes on what was essentially a male role in the *Mahābhārata*. Corresponding to this shift from male to female penance is a corresponding change in motivation. Tāmarai is not interested in celestial weapons but in celestial children.

One other major event in the local epic that compares well with an equivalent scene in the *Mahābhārata* is the lament of a woman for heroes fallen on the battlefield. In the case of that great epic, Gāndhārī cries eloquently on the battlefield where her sons and so many other great warriors have fallen. In the Brothers story it is the sister of the two heroes who sings over their bodies. In both cases these battlefield activities serve as a kind of wake. But Taṅkāḷ, in the local story, has wandered for days in order to reach the place where her Brothers lie. Along the route she shows great fortitude and determination as a woman forced, for the first time, to rely on her own inner resources. Such differences reflect her pleading with the gods. These pleas are so forceful that she manages to bring her Brothers back to life momentarily. All in all, these differences probably reflect the more-central status of women in South India as compared with the North. They also mirror the importance given to the funeral laments of non-Brahman women in Tamilnadu today. It is common

knowledge that local women pride themselves on their skill and creativity in singing dirges, and that they frequently compete with one another over the length of time they can perform.[16]

It should now be clear that the Brothers story builds on much that is pan-Indian. Yet it adds some unique twists to basic themes. The fresh perspective it provides on familiar materials lends this account much of its regional flavor. Several subtle shifts allow the assertion of a local worldview, one often defined by revising (even contravening), wider epic norms.

SEVEN

Moral Principles

COSMIC FORCES

Though the Brothers story is by no means a summary or an imitation of the *Mahābhārata,* it is concerned with issues closely related to central ones in that larger account. Nowhere is that clearer than in the moral underpinnings of the local epic. A concern with fate, with suffering, and with divinity is equally present in both. The local legend asserts many other aspects of the moral framework provided by India's classical heroic traditions.

A similar concept of fate provides one key link between the Brothers story and older and more-literary epic traditions in India. In the *Mahābhārata* the gods are unpredictable actors. Only humans move within known parameters.[1] Put another way, one can say that the great gods of the *Mahābhārata* are unborn and do not die, while ordinary experience is organized by birth and death. Individual human lives lead relentlessly from the first to the second fixed point. Epic heroes combine these perspectives, moving in a space that lies part way between. In effect, they achieve a compromise between linear and cyclical time, or between fate and free will. The heroes of the *Mahābhārata* are neither men nor gods but combine elements of both categories of being.[2]

In the Brothers story the situation is the same. The heroes all possess a quantum of fixed destiny. Cellāttā tells the twins openly of the fate allocated to them, something the goddess does not reveal to other human beings. Whether the two heroes understand her, however, is never clear. (If they are people they should not comprehend; if they are gods they should.) At one point the goddess sings to them:

You are dark-complexioned farmers, my Lords
You were born as a result of penance
You are courageous farmers,

You are Lords, elephant-like ones, sleep
You will destroy the clansmen—
You will destroy Kompan

You will spear the boar, my Lord
You will divide it into seven pieces

Still, this clairvoyant lullaby is not enough to bring the events the goddess describes to fruition. The heroes themselves must then convert her predictions into actions. They do not find that easy. For example, the twins do not recognize the challenge of their ultimate enemy, the wild boar that attacks their well-kept fields. Later they debate whether to go into battle, even after they have already committed themselves and a huge army to the task.[3] Similar dilemmas face each major character in the story. Each knows only hazily what his own "destiny" is. Each hero must exert his own will and energies to assure that such predicted events actually come to pass.[4]

A very concrete image of fate is provided at several points in the bard's oral account. It is said to be written across one's forehead. There no one can see it without the help of others or (equally significant) without the help of a magical device, such as a mirror. Each individual's fate eventually becomes fixed and written down in a great book. But before that point the matter is open to discussion. Once decided, however, one's fate also becomes inscrutable. The mother of the heroes, for example, suspects, but cannot know for certain, what has been written about her. When she hears that her new husband has "not even one acre" of the land she laments:

Has Brahmā written (this fate) on my head,
  alas, has he written it?
The maiden is crying . . .
The flower parrot is pining there, pining there.

Later her husband reacquires a large tract of land, and she learns that she has not married a pauper after all.

One can speak, more generally, of two "planes" of action (one divine and one human) in the Indian epic. Hiltebeitel and Smith concur in suggesting that a lack of synchrony between these two levels probably plays a key role in animating any such story narrative.[5] Often the gods and the heroes operate independently. Once in a while, however, a key god (usually Vishnu) does intervene in some human setting. A temporary merger between superhuman and human planes of action occurs during rituals as well. When the heroes engage in worship, for example, they interact directly with divine beings.

The most-interesting local interplay of divine and human wills occurs in dicing scenes. Playing this game is seen to involve a divination of personal destiny. A win is auspicious and augers good fortune, but a defeat foreshadows some kind of social or political loss. When Yudhisthira succumbs during a famous dice game in the *Mahābhārata,* he is banished from his kingdom and enemies soon threaten his wife's chastity. A significant turn for the worse in the local heroes' fortune immediately follows each dice game as well. Such play seems to force the revelation of future occurrences.[6]

The hidden structures revealed by dicing are usually unfortunate, even tragic, events. The outcome of such ritualistic contests thus illustrates a philosophy where status, comfort, and social order are understood to be impermanent states. Biardeau and Hiltebeitel both argue that India's classical epics frame their heroes' actions with larger images of dissolution. Indeed, orthodox Hindu cosmology holds that everything that has been created will one day be reabsorbed into cosmic oneness.[7] Dicing, with its emphasis on destruction by chance, seems to serve as a concrete symbol of this wider view. In cosmic dissolution man and god are no longer held apart; all levels of action soon collapse into one.

Events depicted in the local epic actually strengthen the Biardeau–Hiltebeitel thesis, which is based on the *Mahābhārata* evidence alone. The same general ideas about human fate and about death and dissolution are found in both accounts. But the folk epic provides the simpler and more-straightforward approach to these matters. For example, the heroic twins are without any family successors. When they die the kingdom is left in the hands of strangers, persons completely unknown. This loss of family identity is less com-

plete in the *Mahābhārata,* where one scion of the Pāṇḍava line does survive.[8]

Seen in a broad view, both epics consider the heroes' well-being to be governed by large-scale cosmic forces. But each story also contains a narrower perspective that attributes human suffering to more-specific and individualized causes. In this sense fate does not rule a person arbitrarily. In many settings a person's station in his present life is spoken of as the necessary outcome of acts taken in the past. The mother of the heroes, for example, believes that she suffers from unspecified sins committed in an earlier life. Why else, she asks, would a woman find herself childless in the present? At one point this hapless woman sings about herself:

> Oh my Lord, I am a childless sinner
> That is what they called me, the people on the banks of the
> Koḷḷiṭam
> The sonless sinner, the sinner, oh my Lord
> That is what I am called all over the world, my Lord, that is what I
> am called.
>
> Oh God! Why is it forbidden to give me a child?
> Release me from the rule of this curse.
>
> The sonless sinner, . .
> That is what I am called all over the world,
>
> The Koḷḷiṭam river, my Lord
> Will be full of fish attached by worms, . . .
> I have become rotten wood, like a rotten oil press,
> I have become a fallen tree, . . .
> Why was I not born as sand?

The heroine is not simply being modest. Each leading character in the story errs at some important point and later regrets his lapse. Indeed these moral flaws are what make these otherwise divine figures partly human,[9] despite their otherwise fine judgment and motives.

Without small flaws, heroic figures would lose their realistic character. The real key to this idea lies in the principle of self-control. A single fault signals the lack of perfect self-determination. If total self-control is one's goal, then any loss of control constitutes a moral weakness. Dicing is such a flaw, both because it is traditionally classified as an improper activity and because it requires submitting to a capricious outcome. In sum, this struggle between internal and

external sources of character control lends both the *Mahābhārata* and the Brothers story their common moral frame. Control over one's own body plays a central role in this value structure. The idea can be seen very clearly in local scenes that focus on personal vows of austerity. The supreme example is the penance Tāmarai performs. To become the mother of twins she spends 21 years motionless, balanced on a pinnacle constructed of beads and flowers. Despite the fanciful description, this picture of her willful determination is compelling. And the outcome is of great interest too. Unlike the generally disastrous results of a dice game, the outcome of determined penance is always positive. Śiva is unable to resist the powerful pleas of a sincere penitent. In the *Mahābhārata,* Arjuna meditates in similar fashion and receives celestial weapons as a reward, but the local epic makes the parallel event much more central to its basic plot.

There is a tendency in both epics to link penance with a death that brings cosmic renewal. Of course, Hindu penance itself is a kind of metonym for giving up life. Extreme penance involves not eating, not breathing, and not moving. If various character flaws (sins, breeches of dharma) weaken man's control over destiny, penance (through transforming the self) helps to strengthen control. The person who faces up bravely to conditions he or she knows will bring on death is performing a kind of suicide. But that sacrifice, since it is selfless, is also transformative. Paradoxically, the outcome is greater (god-given) power and hence renewed life.

The heroes of the local epic undergo a test of their self-control through having to face and kill a wild boar. This animal is a forest-dweller and is most active at night. It is strongly associated with nonhuman spaces, and in the local story it is linked to enemy forces. For all these reasons it symbolizes dissolution and the heroes' potential loss of control over their kingdom. In the *Mahābhārata* the gods similarly test Arjuna. Śiva sends a wild boar to attack him while he is deep in meditation in the forest. Arjuna is forced to shift his thoughts to the attacker, to take aim and to shoot.[10] In both the great and the local story killing the wild boar includes a visit to the sacrificial scene by Vishnu himself. This great god always arrives in disguise and then demands that the dead animal be handed over to him. But the local epic adds a detail, absent in the *Mahābhārata,* that helps to clarify the larger meaning of this event. In the Brothers story Vishnu

specifically asks for the dead boar's head.[11] The twins agree. But they later realize they have just (symbolically) foreshadowed giving up their own lives to the gods. The younger twin cries,

> "Oh my! Elder brother! Instead of taking some meat from the allocated portions you let him have the head? Just as the boar's head has gone, so we shall now give up our own heads."

And their clairvoyant sister gives them a similar warning:

> If you go to the boar, oh brothers
> There will be a sacrifice
> If you go to Kompan
> He will turn into the god of death

There is also a parallel in the *Mahābhārata:* at one point Yudhisthira explicitly refers to heroes who pour their bodies into the sacrificial battle.[12]

Some variants of the story do not insist that the Brothers killed the boar. On the wall of a local temple, for example, a mural depicts the First Minister as the victorious hunter. This loyal outcaste assistant rides a tiger for this confrontation though the kill is accomplished, in part, by a small female dog who simultaneously bites the boar's testicles. It is interesting to note that the goddess Kālī rides a tiger quite often, particularly when she is seen slaying the great buffalo demon. The local mural perhaps suggests the presence of the angry goddess herself by the use of the tiger vehicle and the role of the female dog. As a great black beast, the boar could also be seen as a stand-in for her famous buffalo. In such an interpretation the heroes become helpers in executing some grand design. The conflict becomes cosmic in scope, and the goddess stands at the center, though she is subtly disguised. These overtones fit nicely with the general dedication of the heroes to their local goddess and with the importance of female forms of divinity in rituals that reenact the epic's central events.

Several scholars have discussed the importance of a contrast between inhabited and uninhabited areas for understanding the rituals surrounding classical Indian kingship.[13] Others have picked up on the use of similar motifs in the modern novel.[14] This same juxtaposition is of equal importance in the Brothers story. At one point the

heroes are exiled and forced to wander into the enemy's forested area. Later they are again pressured into contact with the Vēṭṭuvas by their sister, who demands a lovely parrot only found in this hilly area. Van Buitenen says the forest of the *Mahābhārata* is both "demonic and idyllic."[15] This description holds true for parallel scenes in the local epic. Though they are never described in great detail, the forests of the Brothers story are thick with vegetation and plentiful in wildlife. The heroes and their sister meet tigers, birds, a wild boar, and snakes in this forbidding domain:

> Leaving Āṇiyappūr, my Lord
> Searching for Vīrappūr, they are going, my God
> The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkaimalai mountains, my Lord
> The mountain that is hollowed out on four sides, . . .
>
> Leaving the Country Where the Kāveri Flows,
> He is coming to Vīrappūr, my Lord
> Leaving the thick forest, . . .
> Leaving the forest called Kaṭṭapoḷḷi,
> Vīramalai, the huge mountain, my God
> (The place) where there are mountains, all around

Falk has suggested that such noncivilized areas are important to kings because by entering them a man somehow becomes recharged with magical force. Though her idea has some relevance, this recharging also seems linked to opportunities the forest provides for self-control. The local account describes various ascetics and penitents who live in these uninhabited areas. Wild animals in the story also exhibit control. Often they do not attack the heroes, but rather recognize them as akin to gods.

MORAL CODES

There are also some important differences in emphasis between the local epic and Indian moral traditions, more generally. Whereas the *Mahābhārata* usually advocates patience and reason, the Brothers story often has the heroes seek solutions through the use of physical force. Though the men of both accounts live by a strict code of honor, there are differences in definition. The Pāṇḍava brothers are very particular about words. They never go back on what they have said. The local twins place more emphasis on commitments ex-

pressed through action. Once they have drafted men for the great war, for example, they feel they cannot turn back; and once their soldiers have died for the cause, the leaders feel that they cannot themselves go home.

These two epics differ further in their views of the cause of strife and jealousy. In the *Mahābhārata* the roots of conflict are very personal. Though grounded in half-brother relationships or in agnatic cousinhood, the specific annoyances that lead to confrontation lie in individual character attributes. In the Brothers story, however, none of the major confrontations stem from personal grievance. Here men are rivals because of their social or structural positions. Cousins who belong to the same lineage want the same parcels of land. Forest-dwellers and farmers, as well as artisans and farmers, are opposed in principle. They want rights to the same goods. In this sense one can say that the *Mahābhārata* has a more-individualized, and the Brothers story a more-sociological, view of causation.

The main characters of the *Mahābhārata* have a number of small moral flaws. Almost every one of the main figures does something morally reprehensible at some time or other. Yudhisthira deceives Droṇa,[16] while Arjuna is jealous of a fellow archery student.[17] Bhīma speaks out against his elder brother.[18] But, in general, these missteps are rather minor aspects of the larger sweep of events. In the Brothers story there are relatively more abuses of the orthodox moral code. Most of them focus on problems with obeying authority. Every major figure challenges his or her immediate superior at some critical point. The twins, for example, ignore the express instructions of their father not to fight their cousins. Even more pronounced are the many times when the younger hero teases or dresses down the elder. In addition, the sister once refuses to bless her brothers' war implements. And the mother of the twins rebels against her husband, leaving on a journey he has refused to approve.

All these actions go against the standard Hindu behavioral code, a set of rules that recommends absolute deference to superiors of all kinds. Though they are usually associated with India's classical, Brahmanical literature, these high-class norms are well-known to local residents. Asked how one should behave, villagers will readily cite the same official standards that people with more formal education do. This folk epic, therefore, glorifies a kind of informal counterculture. In the world of fantasy, and also of popular entertainment,

peasant tastes lean toward the inversion of given rank orders. The residents of this region obviously enjoy mocking authority, refinement, and high status.[19]

These rebellious motifs are given the greatest scope in the most-localized and least-learned versions of the Brothers story. In the two bardic accounts, the main characters continually assert themselves against persons in high positions. These versions are the only ones that describe the heroes' fight to achieve independence from their Chola overlord. One printed text shows the twins refusing the hand of Chola's daughter, but only in the bardic texts is this rebuke developed into a full-fledged challenge and an eventual physical defeat for the king. The local heroes are thus made out to be the equals of more-distant rulers in every way.

THE ROLE OF THE GODS

The bardic variants develop the same sort of "rebellious" or prankster theme when depicting the gods. In these accounts Vishnu's role is largely that of a trickster (Māyavar), whereas in other versions he is more predictable and is portrayed in more conventional terms.

There are various aspects to Vishnu's local trickster-like role. One of his habits is not to appear directly before a devotee when called upon, but to tantalize that person by seeming to speak from one direction and then from another. Sometimes his "tricks" also include physical hardships for the hero, such as making water evaporate in front of someone desperate with thirst. At other times not enough guests are provided for a ritual feast, or a beggar demands a share of the local harvest the moment it is reaped. These are standard "divine" ploys, of course, and are intended to "test" the devotee's true selflessness. Normally, they are a part of the mythology of Śiva. But in the Brothers story such pranks have been shifted onto Vishnu. Generally, in Tamil folk tradition, Vishnu is Śiva's brother-in-law. This relationship allows for a certain rivalry. Śiva teases Vishnu by trying to restrict his powers. Sometimes he even feigns lack of interest when Vishnu approaches him with a request. On other occasions, however, he tries to bargain. But Vishnu also teases Śiva, by sending penitents to trouble his solitude. His playful challenges of the great Lord are given more prominence in oral versions and less impor-

tance in printed ones. The pranksterish personality that Vishnu displays in the Brothers story helps to demonstrate an attitude of devotion. Bhakti is valued by bards and audiences alike. The heroes, of course, pass these spiritual "examinations" with high marks.

In the *Mahābhārata,* the principle of being "tested" by the gods is important, but this theme appears to be especially central in local versions of that great story. One local *Mahābhārata* paperback focuses on the Pāṇḍavas' "trials" in the forest. And local festivals, celebrating events from the great epic, often make fire-walking the central ritual. The preparations for that physical test always include some combination of asceticism and extreme self-control. Drekmeier, another student of the *Mahābhārata,* notices that at times Krishna is also a trickster. He attributes that to the influence of tribal mythological traditions.[20] Perhaps one need not go so far as to relegate these trickster patterns to the tribal sphere. When a god's divine characteristics include unpredictability and playfulness, then compassion and magical power equally allow him to rescue true believers.

In more-literary versions of the *Mahābhārata* a great deal of information is supplied about Vishnu, and many stock myths about him are recounted in full. But the Pāṇḍavas rarely utter prayers calling on Vishnu for help. By contrast, in the Brothers story a knowledge of such basic myths is assumed. In their place one finds long strings of invocational epithets that make only brief reference to myth. The following descriptive passages illustrate how Vishnu is most often portrayed. His name appears when key characters pray. The formulas are standardized:

> Oh Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe
> He who holds a conch, and a discus and lives in Vaikunta
> Oh seer of Bāla mountain, supreme penitent
> Poor pilgrim, my Perumāl, my Vishnu
>
> The shepherd Perumāl, . . .
> Oh Master! . . . Oh Lord of Conjeepuram!
>
> Vishnu, creator of earth
> The creator of forms, owner
>
> Vishnu, Perumāl
> Kopāla who climbs trees
> He who restored Akalikai
>
> Save me, Harirāmā

You who removed the curse of Akalikai
You who severed the ten crowned heads of Rāvana of Southern
Ceylon
You who uprooted the giants, Harirāmā, come Lord!

The one who sleeps there, the one who sleeps there
On the banyan leaf, . . .
Harirāmā,

The one who rescues people in trouble, orphan-saver
The Lord who has a thousand names, Parantāmā!

Vishnu, apart from having many names, is frequently difficult for the heroes to recognize. Of his 51 appearances in the story, only sixteen are without a disguise. In these cases recognition is easy for the heroes, and no further information on appearance is provided. In another twenty visits to earth this Krishna or Māyavar remains invisible. On twelve more occasions he is a mendicant, in four he takes the form of a fly, in two he is a soldier in an enemy army, and in one more he is a washerman. In all cases he is a lone adult (as Krishna is in the *Mahābhārata;* never is he like the famous baby Krishna or the Krishna in love with Radha). Just under half of Vishnu's appearances in this local account are at his own initiative. The rest of the time he comes because someone has called him in prayer.

In the Brothers story Vishnu helps the heroes in more specific ways than he does in the *Mahābhārata.* In the latter he mainly fights demons, beings who threaten the cosmos at large. When Krishna does appear personally to help the Pāṇḍavas, he serves as their counselor in war. He fights beside these great heroes as a mortal, revealing his true divinity only once. Only a faint echo of that warrior role is found in the local story. Here, Māyavar also appears in battle dress, but only briefly, and specifically on the side of the enemies. Later, dressed as a Vēṭṭuva archer, he shoots an arrow at the heroes to signal their imminent suicide. This ending provides a brilliant simplification of a key theme at best only hinted at in the great epic. In the local story, Vishnu, himself, leads the heroes to their sacrificial death.

The folk mural discussed earlier in this chapter also insists on linking Krishna's role in the *Mahābhārata* to events in the local epic. One scene in that painting depicts Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer and shows the two friends setting out for the Kurukshetra war. However,

this image appears directly beside more-extensive drawings illustrating local scenes from the Brothers story. Just behind Arjuna, for example, come the local troops setting out for the heroes' final battle. This formidable regional army even includes a British-style soldier (seen fourth from the left at the bottom of the illustration on p. 98). By juxtaposition, then, if not directly in words, the folk artist makes clear that he wishes to connect the local account with the *Mahābhārata.*

INTERPRETATIONS MADE BY LOCAL POETS

Do local residents think their epic embodies certain moral themes? Although the average peasant is not able to articulate clearly what the story means to him, several contemporary authors and poets have put together some views on this question in a small pamphlet.[21] There is common agreement that the Brothers story sets high ethical norms before its audiences and thereby raises general moral standards. Although little analysis is provided to show how that happens, the pamphlet makes clear that the main characters of the epic serve as role models for people in everyday life. The heroes embody truth, family honor, and righteousness; while the women are chaste, insightful, and dedicated. But behind these general concepts is a sense that the heroes owe their true stature to their personal sacrifices. It is said that the heroes repeatedly deny their individual desires in favor of local family and community concerns. The fact that they spend no time at all with their wives is used to illustrate this attitude. One commentator uses the term *dharma,* a difficult pan-Indian word for the idea that a man must follow a course of duty set by his station in life, even at the expense of personal suffering. These commentators share my view of the Brothers story's basic moral framework.

Local poets are also aware of their epic's appeal to local pride. They speak of the story's high emotional impact on its audiences. The excerpts they cite often describe local scenery. They depict the great rivers of the area, the high hills, the rich forests, the tall trees, and the general beauty of the landscape in spring. These authors also mention the story's glorification of distinct local customs. Several essays about the epic are illustrated with details describing local weddings, glorious cock fights, a distinctive local porridge made of field corn, and the great hospitality of the local Kavuṇṭar community.

It is clear from these essays and from general conversation that most people are cognizant of the Brothers story's basic sociological bias. They realize that this epic glorifies the Kavuṇṭar community and provides a folk history of the region that accords this group great prominence. Yet they also speak, correctly, of the way this story appeals to members of other castes in the area, even to Vēṭṭuvas. Though they are defined as the "enemy," members of this community also play a central role in the story, and many Vēṭṭuvas currently participate in festivals honoring the Brothers as gods. In addition, several authors touch on the story's relevance to clan identity, citing proudly their own affiliation with particular descent groups that have built major temples in the heroes' honor. They also say that the epic helps them feel at one with their ancestors and share in the same story traditions that were valued in the past.

Another dimension of the Brothers story that local people can speak about articulately is its bearing on concepts of kinship. Particularly important in local eyes is the strong bond exhibited between the two heroic brothers and their lovely sister. These ties epitomize, in their eyes, the broader duties of family members toward one another. The brothers are careful to protect their sister. They try to satisfy her every need. And the sister reciprocates by sharing her magical powers with her two siblings. She predicts the future for them by revealing her visions or dreams. She is also the one to bless their battle swords. Most important, her devotion and spiritual strength bring her brothers back from the threshold of death.

There is also a negative aspect of kinship that is linked to the Brothers story—an erosive and widespread rivalry that exists between patrilineal cousins. The term used in one essay for this feeling is *paṅkāli kāccal,* meaning something like "the fever besetting a group of male descendants." The problem is particularly unpleasant, it is said, because cousins commonly show a united front in public while surreptitiously attacking one another in secret. Much of the action in the local epic is generated by that central kinship problem.

Regional commentators like to point out how well the Brothers story parallels various classical works of literature. One author compares the heroes' sister with Maṇimēkalai, the heroine of a well-known Tamil literary epic. Though this woman is the daughter of a prostitute, she is compared with the local heroine because of her

sagelike personality. Maṇimēkalai eventually becomes a Buddhist ascetic. A common parallel also links the local heroine and the key female figure in another popular Tamil epic, the *Cilappatikāram.*[22] The heroines of these two works are compared not only in terms of chastity but also for their eloquent grief when a male family member suddenly dies. Finally, one essay compares the Brothers story with a famous Tamil version of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* Both are called eloquent because of their ability to arouse poetic emotions. In sum, the admirers of the local epic consider this work the equal of India's great literary compositions. For them the Brothers story is a source of regional pride and a means of both linking and contrasting a local tradition with pan-Tamilian or pan-Indian materials.

Though the Brothers story is still performed by many bards in the region, and parts of it are reenacted yearly at numerous temple festivals, some more-modern uses of this material have also begun to appear. These new developments suggest that there is still great potential for the Brothers story to grow in regional influence. One of the major political leaders of the area has already contemplated making the account into a full-length commercial film. He has puzzled over the way to merge a highly ascetic legend with the contemporary taste for dancing girls and love themes. Perhaps someone will come up with a suitable blend of styles. There is great scope, too, for the use of the story in local political campaigns. Public figures searching for a way to link themselves to the past, as well as to project moral commitment and regional identity, could hardly find a better means of touching the public imagination.

EIGHT

Metaphors and General Comparisons

Epics are narratives that say something about the history of people. They do not give an accurate account of events, but represent a shared cultural view of the past that interprets and blends many popular traditions. Though not fully myths, epics are mythlike in that they enliven certain basic cultural assumptions, providing them with a concrete form of expression. In the Brothers story the opposition of hunter to farmer, and of forest to cultivated land, comes out clearly in the heroes' struggle with the Vēṭṭuvas. The persistent rivalry of artisan and farmer is another broad theme that appears in all versions that were studied. What is true of these caste-linked issues is also true of rivalries between immediate kinsmen. Each of these structures is linked to larger traditions of social organization, and has been incorporated into the epic as one way of reflecting social attitudes at large.

BASIC SIBLING METAPHORS

If caste sterotypes in this local epic reflect the organization of Indian social traditions directly, then relations between members of the heroes' own family bear a double load of meaning. The interactions of brother and brother, or of brother and sister, clearly depict local kinship patterns. But unlike the relations between farmer and hunter, or farmer and artisan, they also speak to a second issue: the perceived place of this regional culture within a much broader framework of Indian values. Each author or editor of a particular

version uses certain popular images of family life, in metaphorical ways, to say something more.

Anthropologists have found that the ordinal position of brothers is often used as a vehicle for constructing cultural models. Siblingship usually conveys moral responsibility and shared rights or understandings. Hence, it is the type of human bond that can import meanings when used as a rationale for some wider set of social relationships. As a metaphor for encompassing hierarchies or for authority and control within a local setting, a reference to brotherhood means more than the recognition of kin bonds per se.[1] In the Brothers story the sibling order of the heroes is purposefully used to express judgments about other hierarchically ordered Indian values. The elder brother in this local epic generally reflects pan-continental, establishment attitudes, while the younger embodies a set of regional countervalues. What fraternity and twinship mean in the family context is thus used to interpret the standing of a specific region and its local values vis-à-vis a nationally known value milieu.

Seen from the outside, the epic's male heroes are twins. They were born just seconds apart, yet one is always said to be older than the other because of that minute difference in birth timing. Variations among the several versions I studied mainly involve shifts in the personality of the "younger" sibling, and hence in the way regional culture is seen to mesh with wider Indian norms. Does the younger brother challenge the elder? Does he embarrass or tease him? Does he end up the true leader? The author of each version uses covert ways to express the place of regional values and traditions in the larger national context. In some versions the sister of the heroes is also important in this metaphoric structure. Sometimes she takes the role of leader, while her brothers become her guardians and protectors. In that case she is identified with Brahmanical traditions, while in other variants she stands behind her male siblings as a localized, magic force.

In India, the formal bond between junior and senior siblings in real life is commonly the reverse of the pattern found in stories. Usually the elder brother serves as the authority figure in actual experience, while younger ones control the outcome of events in popular legends. In the world of make-believe, common assumptions about dominance orders are challenged through the use of reverse stereotypes. Such inversions provide a context for catharsis and release social tensions. They can also be considered thought experiments

that work out new role types. Inverted story patterns are so widespread that there may even be a "cultural need" for them. Wars, famines, and ecological shifts all require the ability to imagine new relationships constructed by rearranging familiar concepts. The broad metaphor underlying regional versus pan-cultural themes in this local epic is one of brothers. Ambivalent local attitudes and mixed loyalties toward the nation's wider social milieu are particularly well captured in the image of multiple births. The very fact that twinship implies symbolic equality makes this a potentially powerful equation.

Significant political metaphors about brothers can also be found elsewhere in India. A nice parallel appears in a turn-of-the-century report by a forest ranger about the Muria Bond tribal community in the Jagdalpur area, Madhya Pradesh. These men once greeted a group of Hindu strangers moving into their territory by stating, "Your god is the elder brother and ours is the younger, but there is no true difference between gods."[2] Here, too, a sibling metaphor is used to express rank order. Yet that hierarchy is simultaneously undermined by inserting a reference to more-basic equalities. This logic may once have served Gond politics and worldview exactly as the Brothers story functions for peasants in the Kongu region today. The pride and rebelliousness hidden in such sibling images probably provides a key to distinctive regional attitudes in other parts of the world as well.

USE OF VISUAL METAPHOR

Three illustrations of the heroes are available: one in the Caktikkanal text (Version L), one on the cover of the cheap paperback edition (Version I), and one on a wall of the Aṇṇanmār Temple in Cantaipputūr, Omalūr Taluk, Salem District, Tamilnadu. The modern poet chose a poster style of illustration, showing an icon normally used in temple rituals; the paperback text uses an old-fashioned line drawing; and the folk text sung by a bard is illustrated by a mural. Not only the artist's medium but also the image of the hero's personality change strikingly in these three depictions.

The illustration in Version L presents a passive heroic figure in a formal setting. His parasol, the flowers draped around his figure, and his stylized wooden horse all personify him as an idol set up for

popular worship. The view of the figure is from below, an additional means of indicating high status and sacred overtones. In the line drawing on Version I, by contrast, the hero and his horse are full of activity. The horse is snorting, and the man has his whip raised. Yet the rider is formally dressed. This drawing gives the impression of an authoritative, royal personage who can dominate and control the countryside. The figure is still above the viewer, but not quite as high as in the first illustration. The temple mural conveys a different spirit, depicting two heroes side by side. And according to the labels, the younger brother is in the lead. That suggests his dominant position. So do their headdresses—the younger brother is wearing the crown. In this illustration, the figures stand level with the viewer.

The three pictures represent very well the differing personalities of the heroes portrayed by different versions of the story. If the first is literal in its representation of an icon, the second is literal in a much more active sense. One can almost guess from the pictures that Version L will show a preference for philosophical themes, while Version I will focus on events at the expense of detail about the heroes' inner qualities. The folk mural on the temple wall provides the least-literal statement of all. Instead it focuses on two figures and hence draws one's attention to possible interrelationships.

GENERATION CONTRASTS

These simple contrasts between versions, expressed through differing illustrations, can be greatly extended by looking at differences in story structure. To do this one must ask how the key figures in each account outline a pattern of contrasts. This particular legend contains two basic kin dimensions: The first is generational and concerns the relationship of a father and his sons; the second is sibling-oriented and concerns the relationship between brothers and sisters. Although generational sequencing and sibling unity are related, it will be helpful to consider each of these issues separately at first. In all major versions of this legend, metaphorical issues underlie these familial roles. Should the characters behave toward each other like Brahmans, being kind, patient, and forgiving to a fault, or should they be self-assertive, brave, and warlike Kshatriyas? Each poet or editor approaches this issue in his own way. Each eventually finds a balanced resolution. At the same time, each compromise is differently constructed.

In all versions I studied, the heroes' father is a meek well-meaning man. He is so weak, in fact, that he is forced into exile by assertive lineage rivals. He does not fight in a single war, not even in a nasty skirmish. Furthermore, he counsels his sons not to pursue their ambitious plans to avenge him. Religion is also important to the heroes' father. He is greatly concerned with temple rituals and with pilgrimages, and he tries to be ethical toward others at all times. At several points he even allows his wife to make her own decisions, giving her this freedom despite his own best judgment. The heroes' father is thus a patient and morally concerned man. Within the larger family framework he is a Brahman-like figure.

Similarly, the younger son is Kshatriya-like in all versions. That is, this young hero is greatly concerned with his family's honor and inherited rights. He wants immediate revenge whenever his family has been threatened or ridiculed. He is quick to anger and quick to fight. He is physically strong, self-assertive, and fearless. For him, justice lies with the man who has the physical strength to claim his own due. Only when his own fighting abilities fail does he stop to ask if some moral oversight caused that personal weakness. The younger brother is a warrior ruler, unlike his contemplative and gentle father. As long as he can fight, personal ability and success are proof enough of good ethical judgment.

This contrast between father and younger son holds for all the versions studied. The main variation among accounts lies in two further issues. One may be called "overall tone." In Version L the younger brother is less vengeful and less violent than in other versions. Even the most-warlike character is more Brahman-like there than elsewhere. Precisely the opposite is true of the paperback account, in which all the characters are rather warlike. Even the father is less philosophically minded and less patient in this variant. In sum, the distance between the extremes of character (most Brahman-like and most Kshatriya-like) is less in the printed texts than in the several bardic accounts. In the latter, these extremes are used to fullest advantage.

A still more important difference between versions concerns the elder son. He lies closer to his younger brother in Version L but closer to his father in the other texts. Catikkanal thus makes the Brahman/Kshatriya contrast a matter of generation difference, but does not use it to differentiate the twins themselves. This version opposes the father and his two sons. But since the father dies while

the boys are still young, the twins can never challenge his style of operation directly. Instead, they must later compensate for his weaknesses during their own time of seniority. The twins win back the family lands and the respect their father had lost without being directly rebellious. Indeed, they attempt to honor their father's name.

In two other texts the generational gap counts for less and relative age more. Seniority is equated with patience, while juniority is linked to a quick fighting response. It is the elder brother who is portrayed in the poster painting for Version L. The popular paperback text (Version I) leaves this identity question unresolved. The text says that the younger hero wore the family crown, but the title of the legend on the cover (where the drawing appears) names only the elder son. The wall mural linked to the bardic versions is the only illustration to give clear priority to the junior twin. These three pictures thus form a graded series in terms of age/rank correspondences, as do the texts themselves. If the senior brother is the hero of the most-urbanized text, it is the junior male of the sibling triad who is the idol of the rural, bardic ones.

VARNA CONTRASTS

The basic oppositions imbedded in any juxtaposition of Brahman and Kshatriya status categories are familiar to all Hindus, though the specific terminology is often replaced by concrete imagery in peasant settings. All-India cultural traditions consistently rank scholarly, ritualistic values above political power. The meditative life-style is deemed superior to an assertive, active pursuit of comfort and status. Nonviolence is honored above warriorhood as a technique of coping with life's problems. The civilization-wide orthodoxy of this value perspective is well known to Kongu residents, but it does not go unchallenged. Chart 21 outlines what happens to these oppositions in the hands of local bards. In folk versions of the Brothers story (I, B and D) a subtle inversion of these basic rank orders takes place. Several intermediate variables are used to accomplish this shift. The logical links in that transformation are outlined in Chart 21. The trick used to transform the rank ordering of varna categories lies in making supposedly inferior values the more-practical and more-effective ones under specific circumstances. Practicality leads to

CHART 21. The Inversion of Varna Rank Orders in Bardic Accounts

Initial Rank	SUPERIOR	INFERIOR
Varna or status category	Brahman	Kshatriya
Initial associations	Scholarly Meditative Nonviolent	Powerful, political Assertive, active Warriorlike
Transformative variables	female	male
	weak	strong
Reversed Rank outcome	INFERIOR	SUPERIOR

strength, and strength to virility, inevitably bringing in the metaphor of male/female differences.

One further place to look for varna themes is in descriptions of the heroes' sister. She is also important to any understanding of the structure of the sibling group. In the modern poet's version, it is the sister who is the most Brahman-like figure in the heroes' family. In both this and other printed accounts she is considered a reincarnation of Draupadī. Her role as spokesperson for upper-class values in these versions is consistent with that link. In the bardic versions, her more-visionary, less-moralizing manner fits with her lack of association with Draupadī. In the most-literary text (Version L), the sister even appears older than the twins, and she frequently lectures them on moral matters. In Version I she is less clearly a mouthpiece for Brahmanical values but still stands on the side of patience and restraint, siding with her elder brother against the younger one. In the bardic versions of the story, however, the sister is a different figure. She now advocates quick and violent action, urging her brothers into challenging situations. She even plays the role of instigator for their most-dangerous escapades, though she worries about their safety and their impending death.

These differing interpretations reflect contrasting ideas about females in general. According to the scholarly poet, this sister is a learned repository of Brahmanical values; but in the folk versions she is a kind of goddess, supplying magical virility to men of war. Such a shift in the understanding of a female character is an important aspect of general class and caste differences. It cannot be considered a simple Dravidian cultural feature that has influenced folk variants

of the story. Draupadī and Sītā, two females found in the *Mahābhārata,* also have a strand of magical power imbedded in their classic epic roles. How much this particular element of female character is stressed seems to depend on the social class and milieu associated with a particular variant.[3]

It is most interesting that the sister is the only sibling to embody a Brahmanical value perspective in the modern, urban text. In this respect she contrasts with both brothers, who together defend a regional and warlike life-style. Metaphorically, Brahman traditions are given a pan-Indian, sisterly status in this variant. They provide a backdrop for regional habits that are male and Kshatriya-like in tone. In Version I, by contrast, the sister is allied with her elder brother, and Brahmanical values now find a mouthpiece in one female plus one male. This text identifies regional, non-Brahman traditions with the youngest, most-rebellious family member, while older siblings of both sexes counsel restraint. Here, then, non-Brahman local values find representation solely in the "youngest" child.

In the bardic texts matters are different again. The elder brother is now the main spokesman for a philosophical, Brahman-like perspective, while the sister and the younger brother stand together on the side of regional values. Male youth and female insight are here allied. Together, these two stand against the story's weaker, older males. Where the printed texts associate a female character with nonviolent attitudes, the oral accounts link her with the most-warlike male. Perhaps that suggests that women are the key to understanding Indian epic structures generally. It also seems to indicate that, in folk tradition, a storyteller's own sentiments are very likely to be placed in the mouth of a key female character.

THE REINCARNATION THEME

Oral and printed versions of the Brothers story use different mechanisms of reincarnation. In all these accounts there is a linkage between the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* and the local twins. This theme appears at the same point in both stories, the moment when Śiva grants the mother of the heroes her request for children. The great god then sends for his account keeper, and together they discuss which of the many spirit lives available in heaven will be used for the promised impregnation. Version L shows Śiva calling for the Pāṇḍavas' five life essences. He then informs these brothers that they

are to be reborn on earth as the sons of the penitent woman now standing before them in the council chamber. The two eldest (Yudhisthira and Bhīma) will become twin brothers (to be born in that order). The other three will be born as their mother's brothers' sons (maternal cousins); and the former wife of the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī, will become their sister (making triplets).

Since all five Pāṇḍavas are reincarnated, according to Version L, there are few subtleties. All five brothers of the original story plus their wife are used; and the rank ordering of original characters is held constant. The two eldest men retain their position of leadership, while the three reborn as their cousins become secondary figures in the new sitting. Yudhisthira, in particular, retains his position as the first-born. Only the rebirth of the Pāṇḍavas' wife is unusual. Her new role is entirely platonic and has been stripped of its conjugal dimension. Her reappearance as a sister is entirely in keeping with the heroes' lack of interest in marriage. Whatever magical female power Draupadī once had as a chaste wife, she now embodies redoubled as a clairvoyant female sibling.

Let us now see what the oral variants do with the same reincarnation issue. The events that occur in Śiva's council chamber lead to some interesting differences. In the bardic versions Śiva rejects the possibility of using the eldest Pāṇḍava at all. Instead, he explicitly orders his account keeper to overlook Yudhisthira and to prepare the second and third brothers' life essences for the great impregnation event. It now becomes clear, as well, just how these spirit children actually are inserted in their mother's womb. Śiva puts the lives of the selected figures in a lime and asks the mother to swallow it. All three remaining Pāṇḍavas, plus their wife, Draupadī, are left out. This time the sister's spirit is drawn from a different source. She reincarnates a virgin maid (a Kannimār) currently serving in the court of Indra. The storyteller of this version does not try to achieve some overall "completeness" for his reincarnation picture. Instead he draws upon several sources in a mixed fashion. The pattern continues when he also obtains the life of an entirely different *Mahābhārata* figure (Āsvathāma) as a spirit source for the heroes' First Minister, Cāmpukā. This man is a Brahman in the great epic, yet he becomes an untouchable in the Brothers story. While none of the printed accounts mention Cāmpukā's ancestry, the oral versions take this opportunity to make his previous life into a subtle symbol of the arbitrary nature of social rank. This kind of transformation is not

done in ignorance. Instead, this is unspoken social commentary inserted by the local bard.

The oral accounts work a further interesting twist on the *Mahābhārata* at the moment that the two local heroes are born. The first twin to exit from the womb (the elder one) is linked to Arjuna. The second twin, by the same logic, incorporates the spirit of Bhīma. Again the local bard purposefully inverts a basic rank order in describing this event. Everyone knows that Bhīma was older than Arjuna in the *Mahābhārata.* Such reversals of sibling rank play a continuing role throughout these bardic variants of the story. At several points the elder twin is compared to Arjuna, and his younger sibling is linked to Bhīma.

Among the five Pāṇḍava brothers Bhīma is the immense and powerful one. He is sensitive about his self-respect and impetuous by nature.[4] Bhīma even speaks with harsh words to his relatives.[5] He looks for fights and battles with powerful demons in the forest. He is the one to kill tigers, lions, and boars.[6] Bhīma also drinks the blood of a slain enemy.[7] All these qualities have direct parallels to the actions of Caṅkar, the younger twin in the Brothers story. For example, Bhīma is famous for his club. Caṅkar's spear provides a multiform of that well-known weapon of death.[8] In the bard's local version, the First Minister explicitly says to Caṅkar, "You have come with a sword like Bhīma!"

Parallels between Ponnar, the first-born twin, and his forebear, Arjuna, are equally clear. In the *Mahābhārata* Arjuna is exceedingly noble. At one point he leans over a slain rival and ministers lovingly to his dying needs.[9] When he introduces his brothers to King Virāta, Arjuna modestly describes his brothers' qualities in glowing terms but says nothing about himself.[10] Arjuna is also righteous,[11] thoughtful, calm, intelligent, and brave.[12] Although he sometimes has doubts about the decisions his superiors take, he always defers to their judgment without protest.[13] More philosophical than Bhīma, he also tries to pacify his senior sibling when the latter becomes angry.[14] Ponnar, the elder twin in the local account, resembles Arjuna (not Bhīma) in all these ways.

The oral performances generally seek out ways to make fun of the elder twin. They especially emphasize his self-doubts and link his general failings to the popular stereotype of a Brahman personality. But in the *Mahābhārata* itself, Arjuna's peaceable traits are carefully balanced by his physical strength.[15] Droṇa, Arjuna's martial arts

teacher, admires him not only for his ready submission to authority but also for his great fighting skills.[16] In contrast, Arjuna's reincarnated form as the elder twin exaggerates and isolates those Brahman qualities at the expense of his warlike abilities.

More important, Bhīma is the spirit behind the real hero in the oral versions. Among the Pāṇḍava brothers, Arjuna is normally a popular favorite. Yet in his new, local form, this great hero becomes almost a comic character. Bhīma, now the younger of the two, repeatedly shows up his brother. Such situations are much enjoyed by peasant audiences. In oral versions, the ambivalence this younger brother expresses mirrors what many lower-ranking groups in society feel about persons of superior status in general.

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES COMPARED

These contrasts of various characters' basic roles or personalities might be called aspects of the story's "deep" structure. They are not the only ways in which the several versions exploit the possibilities of story composition. Some important differences between accounts rest on the use of nonverbal techniques. Bards employ facial expression, tone of voice, and a host of other dramatic techniques in addition to words, the only avenue open to manipulation by the author of a written text.

The very fact of writing helps to focus an author on words and word patterns. Live storytelling, by contrast, sensitizes one to the larger units of a narrative and to the possibilities of capturing the attention of the audience at other levels. For example, the modern poet's variant of the Brothers story expresses its moral principles mainly in verbal statements that issue from the mouths of main story characters. The bard's oral texts, however, convey most of their ethical content either by contrasting two types of personalities or by juxtaposing a given hero and a specific setting. The local folk variants depend less on specific word choice than do any of the other texts studied.[17]

In the bardic versions of the epic the use of tense is quite straightforward. Narrative passages are presented in the past, while dialogue is given in the present. The entire prose corpus of the dictated version makes only one use of the future tense. That appears in the contents of a letter threatening action if certain stated conditions are not met in a specified number of days. In the poetic songs, the

dictated version uses the future tense only where omens or signs foretelling the future must be described. Printed versions of the story, by contrast, make a much more complex use of time markers. For example, the future is sometimes employed to introduce dialogues. One passage switches from past to present in order to highlight the anguish of a palace maid who is captured by enemy forces. In the modern poet's version, which is the most-sophisticated variant in its use of tense, recounted dreams use a mixture of such time cues. This alternation plays up their special magical quality.

The village bard manipulates the sense of time in his story in a very different way. Instead of varying the formal, grammatical features of the language he uses, he "stretches" or "compresses" time in a much more direct fashion. Rāmacāmi speaks of the heroes' grandfather as living to be 111 years old, and says that their mother waited 60 years after her marriage before she gave birth. These simple exaggerations have a special dramatic effect in an oral performance. Another primary means of indicating the passage of time in bardic versions is the repetition of certain song lines, during which a partner plays cyclical drum patterns.

One might also expect a storyteller to have various techniques for conveying ideas about space. Here there is a stark contrast between the village accounts and the two printed texts. While the latter deal with space in a relatively realistic way, the bard relies on exploiting the audience's credulity. In these versions the main characters travel incredible distances. With superhuman strength they brave such things as rivers of stone, thorn, and even fire. Omens and dreams in the oral versions also provide a different quality to space and time in these less-literal accounts.

The structure of the bardic versions particularly stands out against that of the printed texts in the use of parallelisms. Singers use the simple device of repeating synonyms ("god" and "lord," "woman" and "lady") in line after line of a song. Such words help unify a refrain. In the two major printed accounts, by contrast, each line of text is individualized. In a performance, too, there is room for the musical pause. Singing helps to provide a clear hiatus between scenes. It also helps define units of time and space by interspersing linear story development with rhythmic and tonal repetition.

The written accounts of the Brothers story compensate for their lack of parallelism and repetitive filler devices by introducing a new emphasis on meter. Unlike the bard, who periodically adds rhythm

to his lines by fitting them to simple tunes, the author of a written text adds rhythm by choosing and arranging his words so that they follow set poetic patterns. Version I, the popular paperback text, is the most carefully metered account of all. It has regular four-foot lines. Caktikkanal, the contemporary urban poet, by contrast, is freer and more modern in his rhythmical usage. His text contains mainly five-foot lines, interspersed with a few four- and six-foot ones.

VERBAL TECHNIQUES COMPARED

The several versions studied make varied use of epithets. A large proportion of the oral performer's lines contain these special adjectival phrases, but epithets are encountered much less frequently in the written texts. As if to compensate for that difference, those that are used are considerably more complex. In the bardic versions these formulaic descriptors generally consist of two-syllable words (*rāca,* or *cāmi,* for example). Such terms have an invocational quality, and their repeated usage in line after line lends an important ritual overtone to a performance. In the dictated text, for example, the term *rāca* ("king") appears only four times. But in printed accounts, neither *rāca* nor *rācaturai* is used. Instead one finds the sophisticated *rācamannan.* Similar differences exist in the choice of epithets for women. Each term Rāmacāmi used has several close cognates that appear in alternation in the printed accounts.

Female epithets in the bardic texts (B and D)	*Parallel terms in the printed texts (I and L)*
malarkkiḷi	paiṅkiḷi, panaṅkiḷi, aruṅkiḷi
annakkoṭi	poṟkoṭi, koṭiyāḷ, kulakkoṭiyāḷ
pattini	pattini, uttamāpattini, uttami
mayil	mayil, kuyil, iḷaṅkuyil

The village bard uses epithets as he might use salt. They are appropriate almost anywhere, but at the same time a few go a long way. When used by the more-literary poets, however, these expressions become more like exotic spices. Written texts use them only in very specific contexts. For example, in Rāmacāmi's story the epithet *kanni* ("chaste female") is a respectful term of address for any woman. Printed versions of the epic, however, give *kanni* the more-restricted meaning of "virgin" and apply this term only to the heroes'

sister or a nubile celestial maiden. Similarly, the local bard uses the term *Gandhārī* (an admired woman in the *Mahābhārata*) nearly every time a female is praised. But in the paperback account (Version I), this epithet is reserved for the heroes' wives. In fact, there it has an entirely different meaning. It now indicates "an angry woman," and Gandhārī had an irascible nature. Furthermore, the bard's epithets have magical undertones, while in more-literary variants these phrases describe a character's moral qualities. Hence terms like *uttamar* ("the best") tend to substitute for words such as *jamānar* ("master" or "lord") in written texts.

The ritual versions (F and H) clearly stand apart from all other accounts when it comes to epithet usage. As has already been pointed out in chapter 2, each quatrain in these songs has a strong invocational tone. Detailed descriptive expressions like "my royal farmer with a heavy head of hair" or "my jewel-chested and royal-footed one" are absent from all the other versions studied.

Versions F and H are special in their general structure, too. They are closer to the oral performances than to the printed texts in the sense that they give importance to large-scale composition devices. If anything, cyclical repetition and the rhythmic oscillation of paired phrases (parallelism on a grand scale) provide these variants with a more-pronounced structure than any of the others studied.

To have made a total count of the number of epithets used in each of six versions would have been exceedingly time-consuming. Yet I considered it important to make some kind of rigorous comparison of such details as well as of other verbal features in these varied accounts. Therefore, I eventually chose a sixteen-line segment of the final lament for more-detailed study.[18] This scene takes place near the heroes' dead bodies and appears in all the versions of the story I collected. A lament offers the additional advantage of being highly ritualistic. Patterns of formulaic composition are likely to be intensified in such situations, making it easier to find comparable material within a relatively short span of text.

The two bardic versions contain the greatest number of adjectival descriptors, while the printed texts have the least. The ritual texts lie near the middle of that continuum. Although the oral accounts contain a larger quantity of epithets, the phrases used are always short. In the printed accounts, length is not a striking factor, but verbal complexity there is greater than elsewhere. The two ritual versions were found to contain the longest epithets of all.

The search for similes also proved interesting. None of the bardic or ritual excerpts explicitly likened one thing to another. But one example of a simile did appear in the paperback account (Version I). Though only sixteen lines are involved in this comparison, such a finding is suggestive when set in a wider context. This detail fits with Bowra's observation that "in most primitive poetry similes are very rare."[19] The small number of similes reported here also provides a nice contrast with a count made, for the same purpose, of a sample of 200 formulaic phrases important in Sanskrit versions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[20] Thirty-eight percent of these lines were cast in simile form. Though such results are not directly comparable, they do suggest that use of the simile grows and employment of the epithet decreases as one draws closer to India's scholarly texts.

Another famous prediction made by Albert Lord states that formulaic passages as a whole will appear more frequently in oral as opposed to written compositions. That is because stock formulas presumably enable a bard to compose metered lines rapidly. Instead of creating material from scratch, or using a completely memorized text, the Yugoslavian singers Lord studied pieced together known phrases in ever-fresh sequences. Each new sequence was tailored to suit a particular audience and time. Since poets composing texts in solitude are under much less time pressure, Lord reasoned, they will be less likely to resort to repetitive and stereotyped phrases and more inclined to make each line of text unique.[21]

This hypothesis about the formulaic nature of oral epics has received a great deal of attention from literary scholars, since Lord thought his criterion could be used to decide whether a work now available only in written form was once orally composed. One difficulty with the ensuing debate is that it has not been easy to define and identify specific formulas. In prose works, some formulas seem to rest as much on specific sets of ideas or images as on a specific cluster of words. These and other considerations have made questions about formula density very difficult to address with precision.

Chapter 3 described some of the formulas found in the bardic texts and concluded that the song portions of these accounts were highly standardized. In the non-song sections, however, the use of formulas is rare (about once in 50 lines) and limited mainly to well-defined circumstances such as greeting and departure scenes. In the printed and ritual versions of the Brothers story, the usage of formulas is patterned in more-complex ways. Some sections, such as the lament,

CHART 22. Verses Describing the Heroine's Sheltered Existence

Common Verses

In Versions L, I, and H:
I haven't seen the marketplace
I don't know the way to the well
I haven't crossed the threshold (of my own house)

In Versions L and H:
I have never gone into the streets (of the town)

Unique Verses

In Version L:
I have never known a strange courtyard
The fine girl moans, searching for her brothers

In Version I:
I have never known a strange face
I do not know the lightning and the rain
I have never seen the clouds

In Version H:
In your days in the city of Alatūr
I never went beyond the (edge of) the town

Version L = Modern poet's text
Version I = Paperback edition
Version H = Temple manuscript

resemble song passages in the bardic accounts. Whole lines are shared by the different texts, yet their sequencing can vary substantially. The total corpus of lines also differs considerably by text, since each version contains some unique passages. Chart 22 gives some idea of the degree of formulaic overlap in the three written versions studied. These examples are taken from parallel song passages in which the heroes' sister speaks about her lack of protection (after her Brothers die) in contrast to her much-sheltered past. Note the partial overlap of lines and the additional images common to these three accounts.

Another kind of formulaic passage contains a description of an entire set of behaviors. The welcoming of a guest is a good example. In such a situation one would anticipate certain formal gestures (like the serving of fine foods). Since certain rules of etiquette obtain, a fixed sequence of actions can be expected. These ritualistic occasions create a good opportunity for the use of formula, yet even here considerable variation can be found. In passages that describe the

serving of a guest, many repeat items appear, but with little actual overlap of wording. An additional excerpt from another folk story has been used for this particular demonstration (see Chart 23), as not all the epic variants in question describe a feast.

A battle scene also lends itself well to formulaic composition. This kind of setting allows for a stereotyped description of events. Warlike behavior differs from the reception of an honored guest in permitting more poetic hyperbole. In a battle scene a looser sequencing of sub-events is evident as well. Chart 24 compares parallel passages depicting war. Many of the descriptive images are similar in all three accounts. There is a common focus on chaos and violence. Here, too, several phrases are shared but no full lines are identical.

CHART 23. Verses Describing the Serving of a Guest

Version I (p. 21)	Version L (p. 154)	M (pp. 26, 37)
(He) gave them both a dinner at the palace	(The) serving maids, who were like beautiful peacocks,	
	(They) served rice properly	(She) served rice with accompaniments in proper order)
	(They) served a heap of dhall	(She) served a heap of dhall,
	(They) poured ghee by the potful,	(She) poured ghee without hesitation,
(He) served dishes of six different tastes, with affection	(They) placed in front of him, decorously, sixteen kinds of vegetable dishes	(She served) a variety of tasty vegetables and dishes
(He) gave them lots of fresh, green betel		(He) gave them all betel and areca nuts, kindly
(He) smeared them with sandal, musk, and scent		(He) smeared them with sandal and musk
(He) gave them new clothes, and presents, (He) sent them to their country, truly		

Version I = Paperback edition
Version L = Modern poet's text
M = *Maturaiviran Katai* (The Story of the Brave Man of Madurai) (Madras: R. G. Pati Company, 1967 edition). This popular local story is written in the same style as Version I and appears in the same paperback series.

Chart 24. Verses Describing a Great Battle

Version I (p. 76)	Version L (p. 127)	M (p. 58)
(a) ānaittiraḷilē yāḷī ciṅkam pāyntāppōl		(a) yānaiyin kūṭṭattil yāḷī vantu pāyntatupōl pollāta vīran purttiyāy vicalunrān
(b) vīcinarappōtu vēṭṭuvarkaḷ tanvaṭaiyai	(b) mēliya vāḷtumma viṭṭu viciṉar nalla caṅku	(b) vīcinān kaḷḷarkaḷai vīrātivīranantān
(c) mūnvīccukkāyiramāy pinvīccukkāyiramāy		(c) munvīccukkāyiramvēr munaivīccukkāyiramvēr
(d) paṭṭu viṟuvārum parntu tavippārum vēl paṭṭuruvi viruntu kiṭappārum	(d, e) kālantru vīrvārum kaiyatru vīṟvārum velatru vīṟvārum mēni tuṇṭamavarum	(d) mey cōrntu viṟuvārum viticavamō enpārum
(e) kālarruntruviṟuvārum kaṇṭatuṇṭamāvārum veṭṭikkuvittārē mēnāṭṭu veṭṭuvarai		(d) āti civanukku apayamenru viṟuvārum
	Translations	
(a) Like a yāḷī falling upon a herd of elephants		(a) Like a yāḷī falling upon a herd of elephants, the terrible warrior swept (them) completely
(b) The Vēṭṭuvas fell as he waved (his sword)	(b) The good, righteous Caṅkar waved his sword	(b) The great warrior waved his sword at the Kaḷḷars
(c) In front a thousand, in back a thousand		(c) In front a thousand men fell, in back a thousand men fell
(d) Some falling wounded, others fleeing in alarm	(d, e) Some falling without legs, others falling without arms, others falling without lances, others having been cut to pieces	(d) Some falling worn out, some wondering if it was fate
(e) Some falling without legs, other having been cut to pieces		(d) Others falling and crying, "I surrender" to Śiva

The actual order in which these lines appear is b, c, a, d. They have been rearranged here to make comparison easier.
Version I = Paperback edition
Version L = Modern poet's text
M = *Maturaivīran Katai*

From the foregoing examples it is clear that to estimate exactly what proportion of a text is formulaic is always difficult. More challenging still is the task of determining whether one variant is more or less formulaic than another. Nonetheless, as an experiment, a count of formulaic phrases was tried on sixteen selected lines of each lament. The definition of formula that was used required that one or more words be perfectly duplicated somewhere (not necessarily in the lines selected for study) in any other known version of the same lament. In how many instances was the wording of the sixteen chosen lines repeated, according to this criterion? Once again a clear gradation of the six versions emerged. The bardic accounts contained the largest number of formulaic phrases, while the two printed texts contained the least. The two ritual variants lay in between. To the extent that it was possible to "test" Lord's prediction, his forecast held true. For closely parallel lines, the oral variants do contain more stereotyped phrases than the written ones.

Lord also thought that an oral performer would make extensive use of open sentences. That is, bards prefer to continue freely, line after line, avoiding full grammatical stops wherever possible. Lord called such stopping points "necessary enjambments" and predicted that there would be fewer of them in orally produced materials and more in written works.[22] This reasoning is logical, since a bard must compose rapidly, often stringing phrases together as he goes. The present findings, though not dramatic, do support Lord's suggestion.

Chart 25 is a summary of several comparisons among the bardic, ritual, and printed texts with regard to epithet, simile, formulaic phrases, and enjambment usage.

ABSTRACT REASONING

Lévi-Strauss has argued that mythological thinking is concrete and that modern systems of communication are more abstract. But the oral texts studied here require abstraction in another sense. Oral storytelling encourages the listener to focus on concrete indicators and to infer his own psychological or moral correlates. Written texts supply these important inferences directly. Take two simple examples of this difference. When Rāmacāmi describes the heroes' mother weeping over her barren condition, he chooses phrases that contrast her delicate body with the hardness of the environment that con-

CHART 25. Comparison of 16 Lines of the Final Lament

	Version					
	Bardic		Ritual		Printed	
	B	D	F	H	I	L
Number of epithets	5	4	3	4	2	1
Number of similes	0	0	0	0	1	0
Number of formulaic phrases	8	6	5	4	2	1
Number of examples of enjambment	6	5	7	7	8	8

fronts her. In the printed texts, concrete details about her physical vulnerability are abandoned in favor of words that describe her mental anguish. Hence, in the first account the listener must abstract for himself the pain of the situation, while in the second the reader is told directly about the subject's feelings. In another scene, the bard depicts the same woman reminding her husband that local custom forbids their taking food from the hands of Vēṭṭuva hunters. The written texts omit this detail but include a direct reference to the "fact" of Vēṭṭuva moral inferiority. A similar social judgment is required to understand both versions, but in the oral accounts the listener has to abstract those principles for himself.

The need for abstract reasoning helps to draw listeners into a bard's story as active participants. This seduction effect is heightened by the fact that most performances take place at night. When the lighting is low and shadows move across the field of vision, the imagination is stimulated. The ears are occupied, but the eyes are not fixed, as they would be to specific objects in a staged presentation or to words on a page. In such circumstances the visual apparatus of the mind is freed. Of course, other senses are drawn into the story upon listening to rhythms. In a good lullaby, for example, one can "feel" the cradle rock. In a song about an ironsmith's workshop, the sharp metallic blows can be heard in the tension of the bard's voice. Even more than while watching a drama on stage, the private imaginations of the audience become fully engaged in the hands of a skilled bard. Much has been gained by the advent of the written word, but much that is important is also being lost.

Conclusion

An epic is a superstory. It is the folk genre identified with legend-telling par excellence. Five special features make it clear that the Brothers story belongs to this high-status category: it is told by professional bards; it is extremely long, far longer than the longest folktales that circulate in the area; its heroes are sacred figures worshipped at local temples; it has links to wider mythological and civilizational traditions; and its audiences and tellers both believe their epic depicts actual historical events. All these properties signify that this account is far more important than the ordinary folktale or legend. The Brothers story is special precisely because it blends mythic references with substantial features of day-to-day reality.

A long succession of storytellers must interact with numerous live audiences to produce a folk epic. As these stories gradually grow from legends, they become more and more embroidered by community tradition. Sometimes epic accounts become so popular that they begin to incorporate diverse geographic and social features important to a wide culture area. They may even become a root story for a great civilization. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, India's two great epics, presently enjoy a pan-Indian status of just this kind. The process that gradually refines such epics and makes them respectable vehicles of dominant class attitudes, however, also helps to separate them from everyday peasant life. When the gap between high-status outside views embodied in such works and the attitudes of marginal folk groups becomes too great, a new space opens in community

tradition for legends that better express regional concerns. In the local Brothers epic, for example, artisans and farmers are the important figures, not the teachers, warriors, or ascetics of Indian classical tradition. Such a story can depict a poignant set of counter-identities precisely because it finds ways to place new but familiar themes in relation to the frame points of a known superstory.[1]

An established hierarchy of pan-Indian values has long constrained the rise to prominence of specific local ones. Pan-Indian story traditions similarly encompass and continually influence the growth of local legends. Peasant audiences and folk bards are sensitive to social pressures that stem from these wider norms. Responses to that larger cultural milieu are generally complex and marked by a profound ambivalence. Scholars have often used the term *Sanskritization* to describe this dynamic, particularly the attempt by low-status groups to raise themselves socially through an imitation of the learned, the mighty, or the monied classes. Sometimes a particular Brahman community, a dominant caste group, or even a handful of Europeans have been implicated as pace-setters. Sanskritization is too simple a process, however, to account for many obstinate facts. Both foreign social scientists and elite Indian observers have readily accepted this view from above of how people strive to reach "up." The present study demonstrates how important to local self-esteem a different process can be: one where creative and subtle opposition to high-status models has popular support.

The Brothers story is a mouthpiece for the powerfully mixed judgments of those who live on the margins of a wider political system. It describes their view of those who move at the center. References to India's great epics and to known Brahmanical views are found throughout this regional legend. What is more impressive, however, is that this account mocks so many pan-Indian norms. Opposition and inversion both play key roles in this epic's thematic organization. These structural features help to define the story as separate from the great literature of India in many ways. In fact, these particular details thoroughly color its oral variants. Sanskritization, as a desire to imitate or to borrow, does not take account of this counterculture construction process. *The Three Twins* attempts to capture the playfulness, double meanings, and sense of paradox so deeply imbedded in this regional perspective. It also lays out some of the richly textured details about a specific folk identity that this specific legend projects.

Appendix I

The Epic Dice Game: Parchesi

Dicing appears to be a very old sport on the Indian subcontinent. It is mentioned in the Ṛgveda,[1] there is evidence for the use of dice at Indus Valley sites during the third millennium B.C.,[2] and references to this "sport" appear throughout the literature of later periods. Indeed, the central dicing episode of the *Mahābhārata* is perhaps one of the oldest portions of this venerated story.[3] Even more significant is the use of dicing images to depict the rationale behind cosmic forces. Two of the ultimate gods of the Hindu universe, Śiva and Pārvatī, are often pictured in myth playing dice in their mountain abode. Sometimes Pārvatī becomes disgusted with the outcome of the game and walks away from her husband in anger. It seems likely that such mythical events are intended to coincide with sudden disruptions or natural disasters on earth. A major human problem can actually "cause" the gods to interrupt their dice playing.[4]

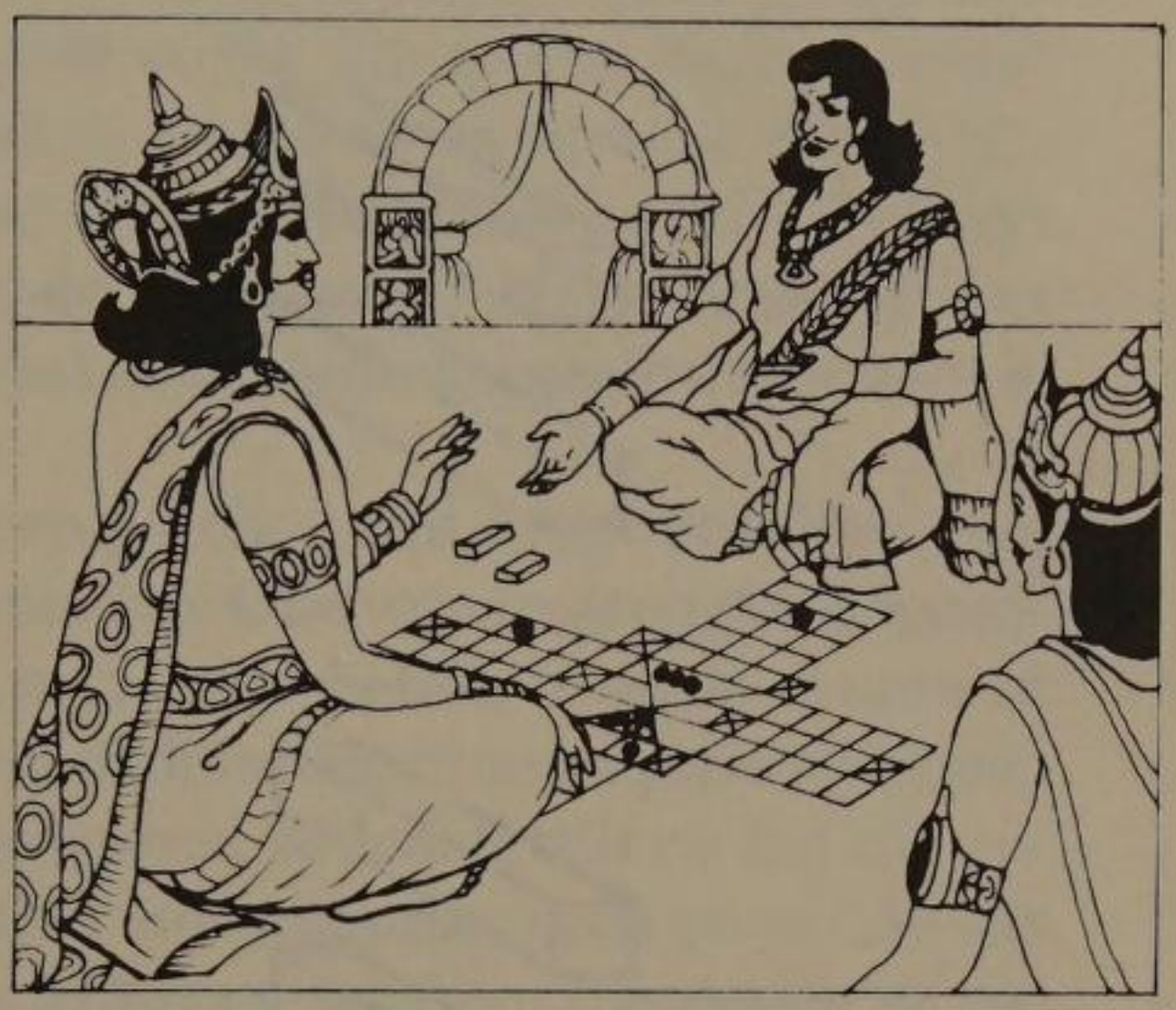
It is not just paramount gods, however, who engage in dicing. The finest of human kings are also attracted to it. Sakuni, for example, invites Yudhisthira to play dice with him. In another very famous story (also included in the *Mahābhārata*) the great King Nala plays dice with Pushkara. In both cases the more righteous of the two contestants loses. Both Yudhisthira and Nala experience exile (and also, a temporary loss of their wives). This pattern of good men losing seems to be associated with repeated derogatory remarks about dicing in India's epic and moral literature.[5] The pattern is similar in the Brothers story. The twin heroes suffer an unfortunate turn of events,

directly threatening the prosperity of their kingdom, immediately following each of several dice games.

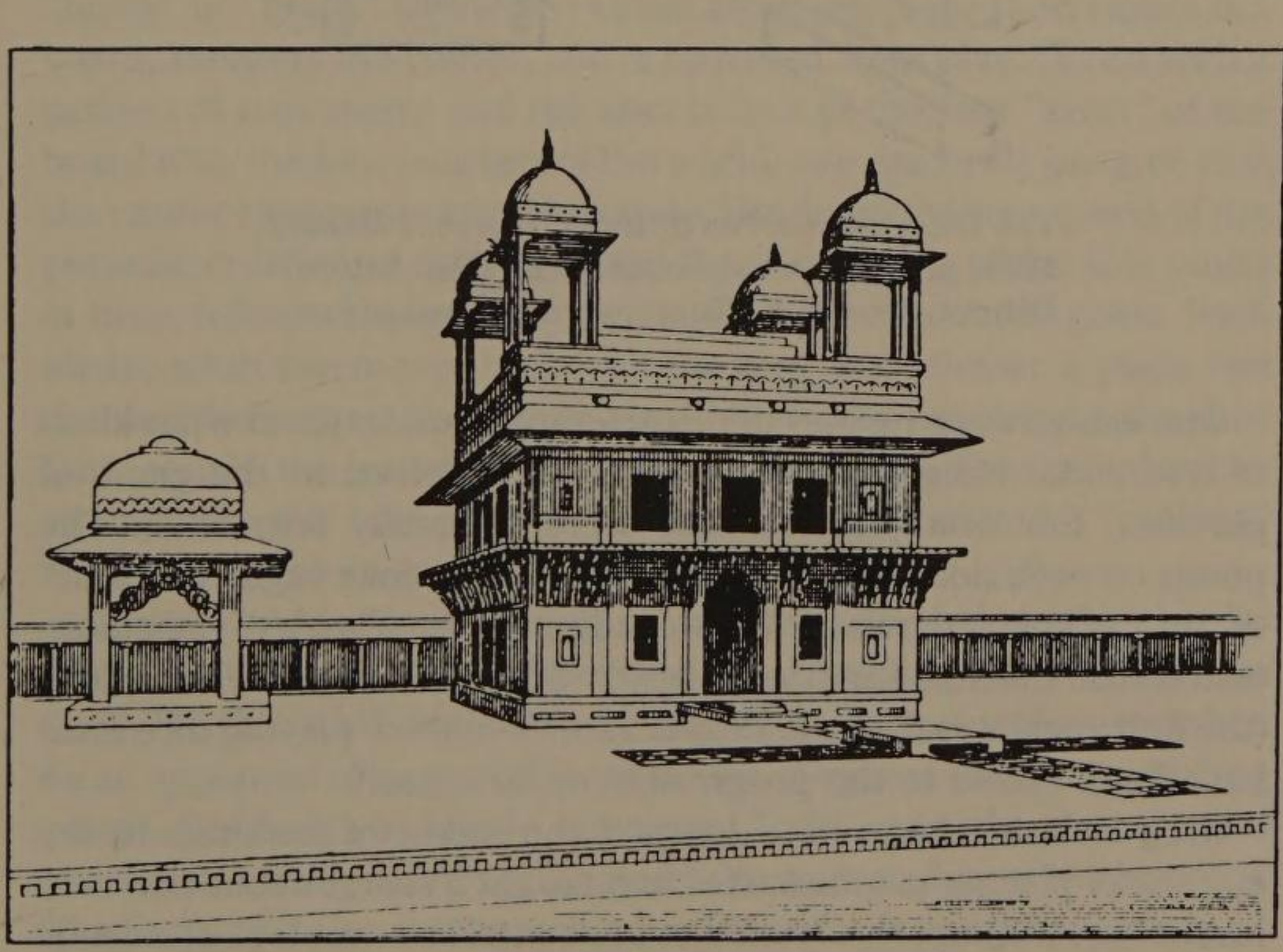
The association of kings with dicing is not just an ancient or mythical theme. As recently as King Akbar (1556–1605), dicing was a popular royal pastime. Akbar was so devoted to the game that he erected huge marble playing boards outside several of his palaces. He used to sit there, with his courtiers, while female servants, serving as human "pieces," were moved around the mammoth playing space after each throw of the dice.[6] In older texts kings regularly had large dicing halls attached to their palaces (as the twin brothers in the local epic do), and these halls had some magical or religious significance.[7] When a dicing space was laid out on the ground, the area was first marked off by a large circle that consecrated the playing space and designated it as sacred. There are also several references to a link between dicing and the science of divination or geomancy.[8]

Ancient and modern sources seem to be in general agreement that this ritualistic dice game was played in much the same way as the contemporary North American game *parchesi.* Puranic descriptions of dicing suggest that, as does the shape of Akbar's own game board, which is still visible at the historic site of Fatapur Sikiri. Parchesi, locally called *Tayakkaram,* is a popular diversion in the Coimbatore area today. Chart 26 shows the playing board in current use, and the back cover of a contemporary Tamil journal shows Yudhisthira and Sakuni seated in front of precisely such a board.[9] Villagers in the area say with confidence that the twin brothers played the same game.

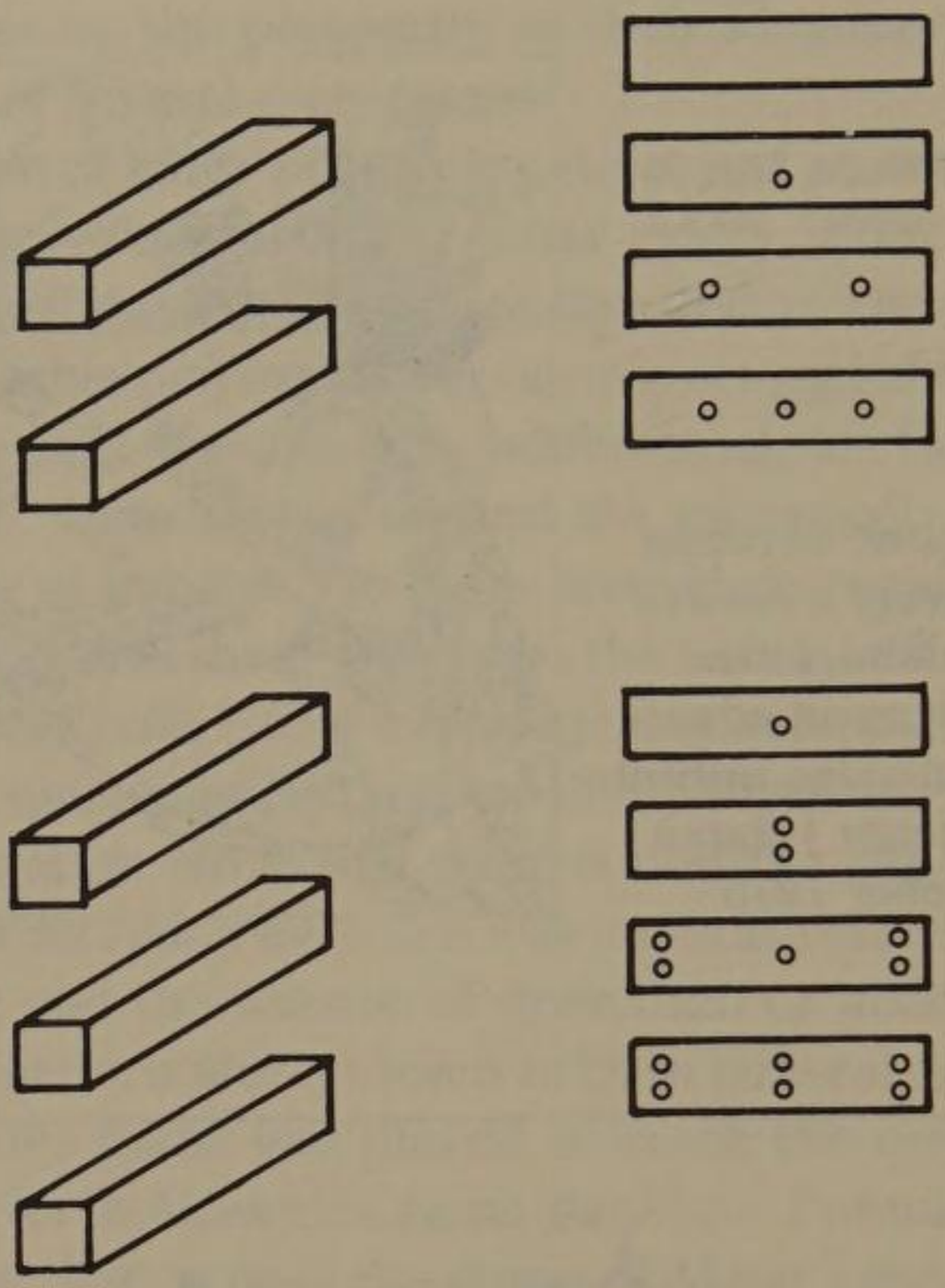
One could hardly set out to invent a game that would contain more cosmic and yogic overtones than parchesi. A parchesi board has four equally extended arms joined by a square central space. This layout accords nicely with the Hindu habit of depicting the cosmos as square and the human world as having four quarters.[10] According to at least one description, the board for the great *Mahābhārata* dice game was constructed with the help of astrological calculations. The players' optimum positions were reckoned on a square diagram containing the signs of the zodiac.[11] The winning strategy was to occupy a "house" 4, 7, 9, or 11 squares distant from the house of an opponent. Therefore solar houses were aligned with ones on the gaming board, though it is not clear just how that was done. The movement of pieces could then be likened to the movements of the sun and the planets through the heavens. If the game reenacts cosmic movements, then each outcome was thought to predict actual, personal consequences.



The great dice game between Yudhisthira (wearing a crown) and his uncle, Sakuni, in the *Mahābhārata.* From an advertisement for a language institute, back cover of *Ānanta Vikaṭan* (Madras), 26 October 1975.



Dicing board in front of Akbar's palace at Fatapur Sikiri. Source: Falkener, 1961, p. 257.



The Dice. Above, North India (source: Falkener, 1961, p. 264); below, South India, Coimbatore District (source: K. Cuntaram of Ōlappāḷaiyam).

One can go even further in this attempt to understand what kinds of traditional imagery might have been involved in the game of parchesi. For example, the dice were generally four-sided. The points on each side were once named after the four yugas, or "ages" of time, which progressed in descending order. The first yuga (associated with the number 4) was considered the finest, while the fourth (the Kālī yuga) was the most degenerate. Somehow playing dice must have been linked to the progression of time itself.

King Nala is said to have learned the secret of numbers in the context of playing parchesi. He then taught a secret about horses to his master, Ruthuparna. Numbers are central to astrological calculations, while horses, in Hindu mythology, are thought to pull the sun's chariot across the sky. The secret of horses and the fact that the playing pieces were sometimes called horses[12] connect nicely with the idea that each player's movements were linked to the sun's progression through the sky.

In parchesi the pieces move around the board counterclockwise.[13]

Just as yogic concentration can reverse a downward flow of energies and help reassemble body forces at the top of the skull, so these exercises are sometimes linked to a reverse movement of the sun through the houses of the zodiac.[14] The counterclockwise movement of parchesi pieces can be speculatively linked to this revitalization symbolism, an idea similar to that of rewinding a gradually loosened spring.

These suggested links between parchesi and larger astrological or yogic concepts must remain tentative. One way to strengthen speculation of this kind, however, is to ask whether a single theme or pattern pervades a large number of different dimensions in the material studied. In the present case several added details on the rules of the parchesi game are suggestive. For example, each player (in the traditional Southern game) starts his pieces from the center of the board. They cannot leave the center until the player obtains a "lucky" or "grace" throw (see Chart 26). Each piece then circles the board, reenters the center, and is removed from play. Given such a pattern of movement and the associations of the four "arms" of the board with the four quarters of the world, one can easily imagine that the center represents a timeless state. Hindu mythology speaks of the periodic creation of the world and the playing out of the four yugas of time, followed by reabsorption and a return to nothingness. Such ideas match the moves of the pieces very well. Before a piece can reenter the center, the player must obtain the number on the dice that equals the number of spaces remaining. This rule further strengthens the idea that the center once symbolized a "release" from the world or an escape from time.

Certain "castles" or "mountains" are distributed along the circular route that the parchesi pieces take. Each such space is defined as "safe," in that while a player is resting there he cannot be overtaken by an opponent or captured (capture sends a piece back to its starting point). Similarly, in Hindu astrology, "safe" periods or auspicious constellations of planets are located in certain regions of the heavens. The entry of a planet into such a locale results in temporary prosperity on earth. All these concepts "fit" with a single broad interpretation on the parchesi game based on a sophisticated astrological worldview.

Each of the four fixed colors of the playing pieces—black, red, yellow, and green—represents one of the four seasons of the year,[15] providing yet another set of references to the passage of time. These

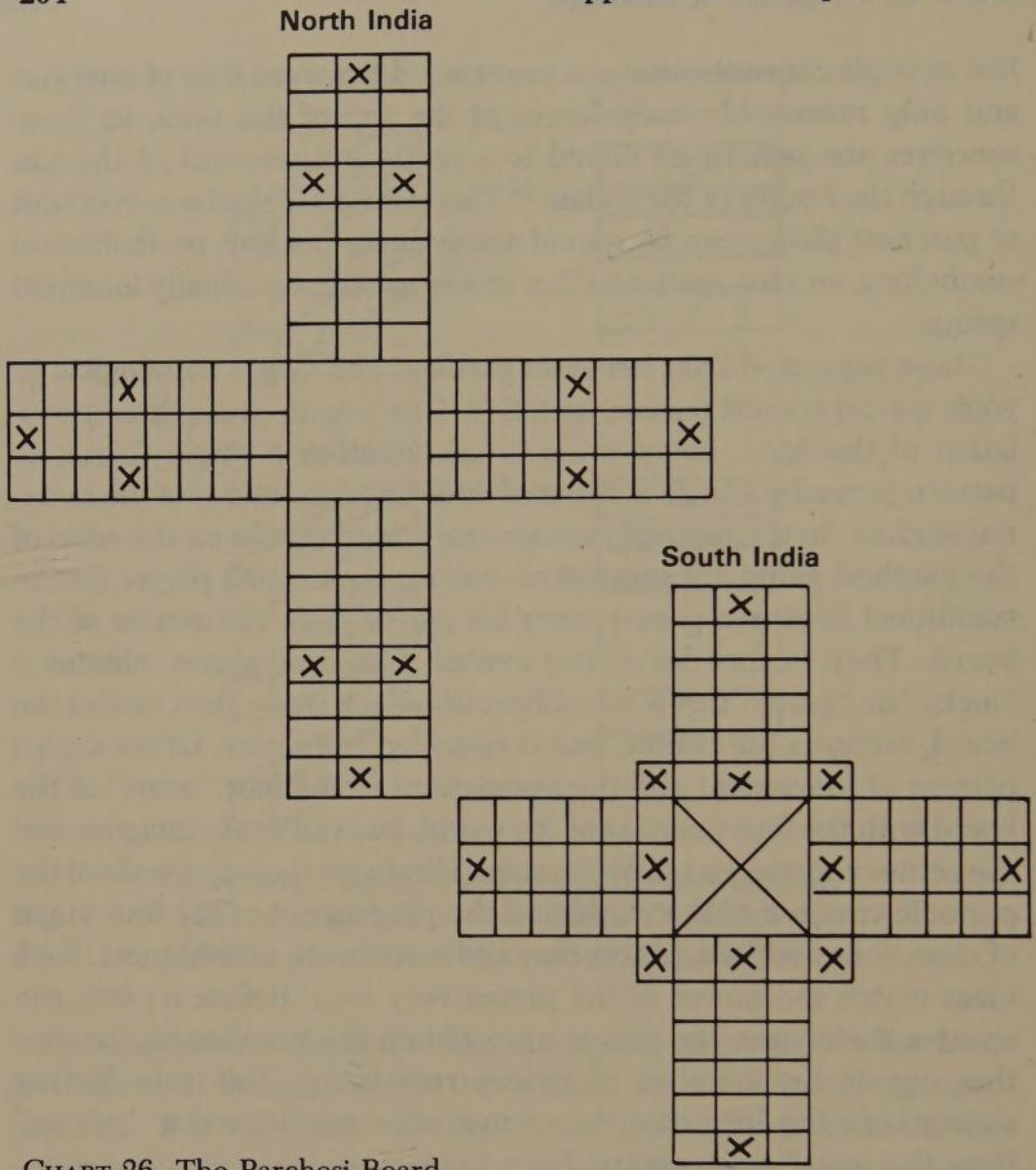


CHART 26. The Parchesi Board

In North India the game is called *Pachisi* or *Ludo.* There is no rule governing the entrance of the first piece; other pieces require a 6, 10, or 25. Numbers are generated by the throwing of six dice or six cowries according to the following scheme: no cowries with mouths up, 25; one mouth, 10; two mouths, 2; three mouths, 3; four mouths, 4; five mouths, 5; and six mouths, 6. Safe spaces (X) are called "castles." Sources: Falkener, 1961, pp. 258, 261; Bell, 1960, pp.9, 10.

In the Coimbatore District of South India, the game is called *Tāyakkaram.* The first piece requires a 1 to enter; the other pieces can enter with a 1 or an 8. Numbers are generated by two four-sided dice or four cowries, according to the following scheme: no cowries with mouths up, 8; one mouth, 1; two mouths, 2; three mouths, 3; and four mouths, 4. Safe spaces are called "mountains." Source: K. Cuntaram of Ōlappāḷayam.

four colors are paired, just as the players are, into two sets: red must play with black, yellow with green.[16] Held has suggested that the two parties to the game in the *Mahābhārata* represented the two halves of the cosmos locked in contest.[17] He speculates that the game represents the divine and the demonic locked in a titanic struggle. Indian astrology speaks of a similar division of the year into bright and dark, auspicious and inauspicious, halves. The pairing of these four colors may link the parchesi game to other Hindu ideas about symbolism.

The fact that the heroes of the local epic play dice with the gods is significant. Others have already noted that when humans play parchesi the game tends to be lively and to involve the free mingling of castes that might otherwise remain apart.[18] Parchesi requires an equality of status among its various players that would be denied them outside the magical gaming circle.[19] Though these descriptions are concerned with human contestants, a similar principle may be even more significant when a god enters the contest. When Vishnu plays against the twin heroes, for example, the divine/human separation is temporarily suspended.

Inside the magic playing circle god and man can contest on an equal footing. Both submit to the roll of the dice. Yet a fear of deceit and trickery remains (the Tamil word for dicing, *cotu,* also means deceit). A number of general references to this idea are contained in the *Mahābhārata* itself. Dice are unpredictable for mortals, but the gods know what is in store for the human players. In some sense, only the gods "know" the numbers' secret. Only they can judge accurately how the dice will fall. Sometimes, of course, Indian parchesi is explicitly linked to geomancy and to secret formulas.

There are several variants of parchesi (using a square board with either 25 of 49 subdivisions), but the principles of the game remain the same.[20] One version, called *chaturanga,* uses specialized pieces, each having restricted and specified movements. It represents an Indian version of chess. Indeed, one square version of parchesi apparently evolved into that more-complex game.[21] Several stories describe the use of dice in chaturanga. In one, Yudhisthira asks the sage Vyāsa how to play.[22] In chaturanga, however, the skill of the player matters more than chance. Perhaps that is why chess has never enjoyed the same symbolic role as parchesi in India's great epic literature.[23]

Appendix II

Hero Shrines and Shrine Areas

The maps that follow show various ways that the heroes of the Brothers story are incorporated into local temple structures and illustrate a range of situations in which these heroes are worshipped. Different figures appear in the various settings, and their relationship to other images in the same compound varies. All the temples have some link to clan and caste groupings, though in several cases worshippers who do not belong to these groups are also welcome. The temples also vary greatly in size (see chart below).

Name	Size	Main caste affiliation	Number of story characters present	Prominence of character
1. Vīramalai Periyakkāṇṭiamman Temple	Large	Kavuṇṭar	Three inside, seven outside	Primary and secondary
2. Moḷiyapaḷḷi Aṇṇanmār Temple	Large	Kavuṇṭar	Six plus festival icons and one uncertain figure (Kōmāḷiaṇṇan)	Primary and secondary
3. Ōlappāḷaiyam Karuppaṇacāmi Temple	Medium	Kavuṇṭar	Four	Secondary
4. Liṅkappakavuṇṭanvalacu Aṇṇanmār Temple	Medium	Kavuṇṭar	Seven	Primary
5. Tāyampāḷaiyam Kongu Cēṭṭiar Temple	Medium	Cēṭṭiar	Three	Secondary
6. Murukaṅkāṭu Tampi Kalaiyan Temple	Small	Nāṭār	Three	Secondary
7. Putūr Raja Temple	Small	Nāṭār	One	Secondary
8. Paṭukaḷam	Medium	Kavuṇṭar	Eight	Primary

Key to the Temple Maps

Temple compound wall

Inner structure (inclosed room)

Large pottery horse (or other, large sculpted figure)

Swing (for a god's amusement)

Flag pole

Base surface used for offerings (pali pītam)

Bull vehicle (for a gods' use)

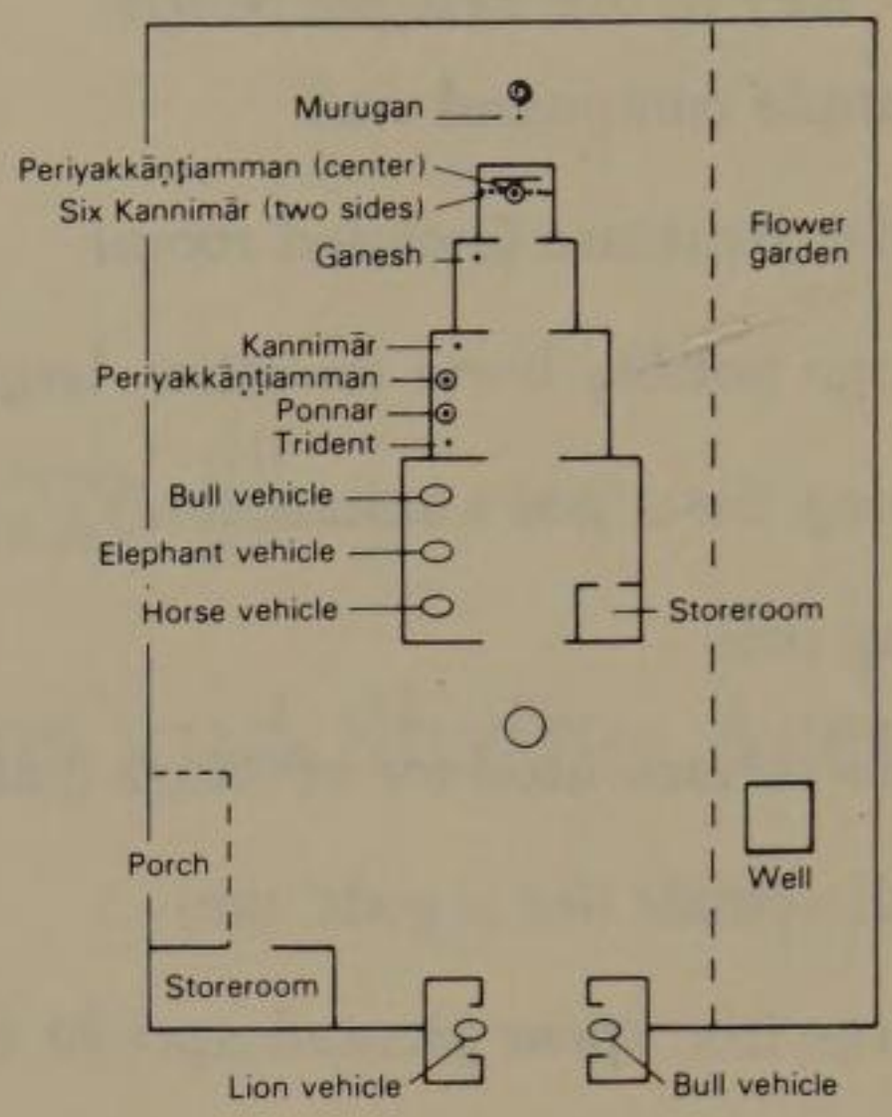
Large iron spear planted upright in the ground

----- Edge of a raised, smoothed floor, or other distinct area

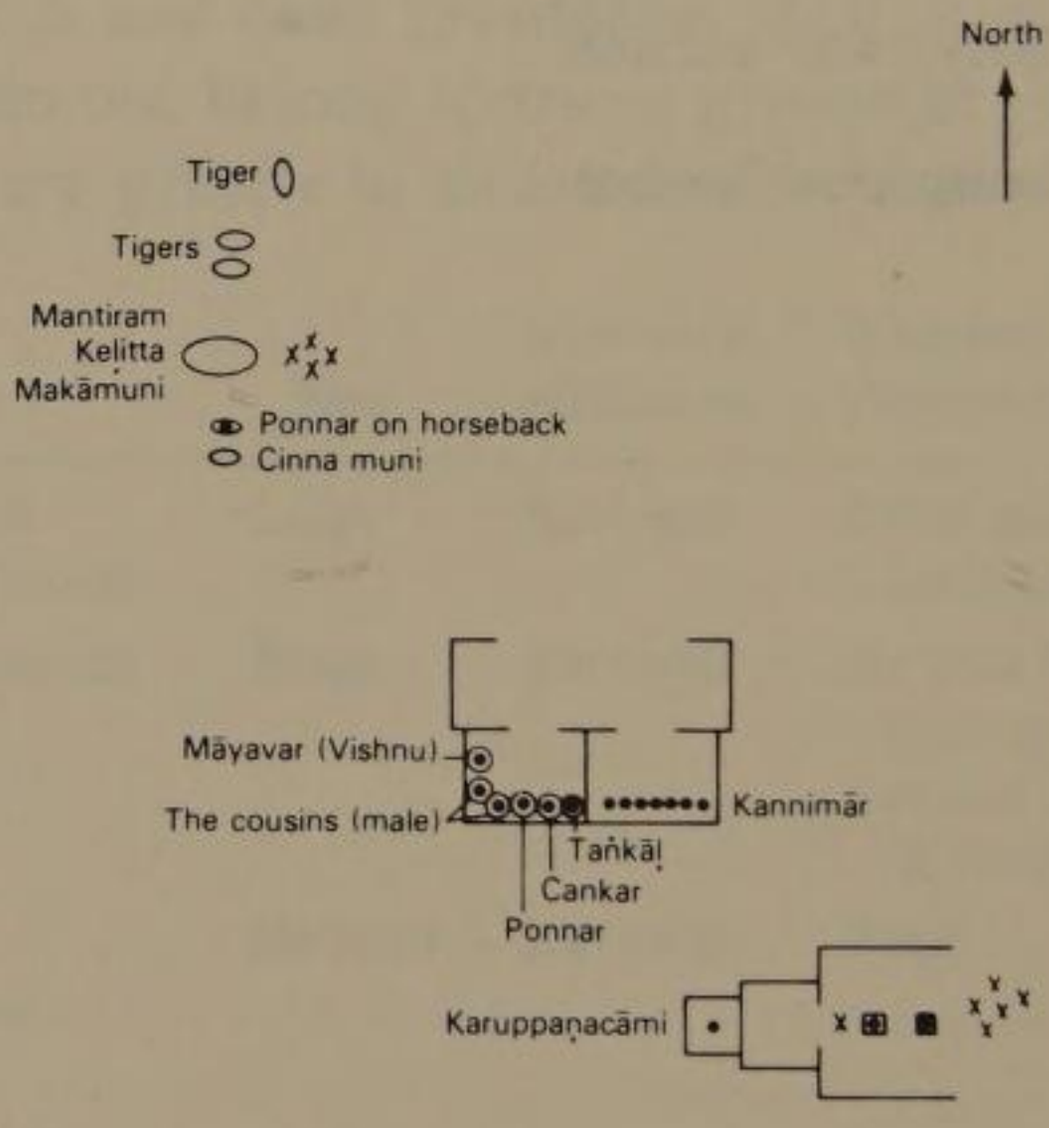
Tree

Character from the Brothers story (or a specific deity), any version

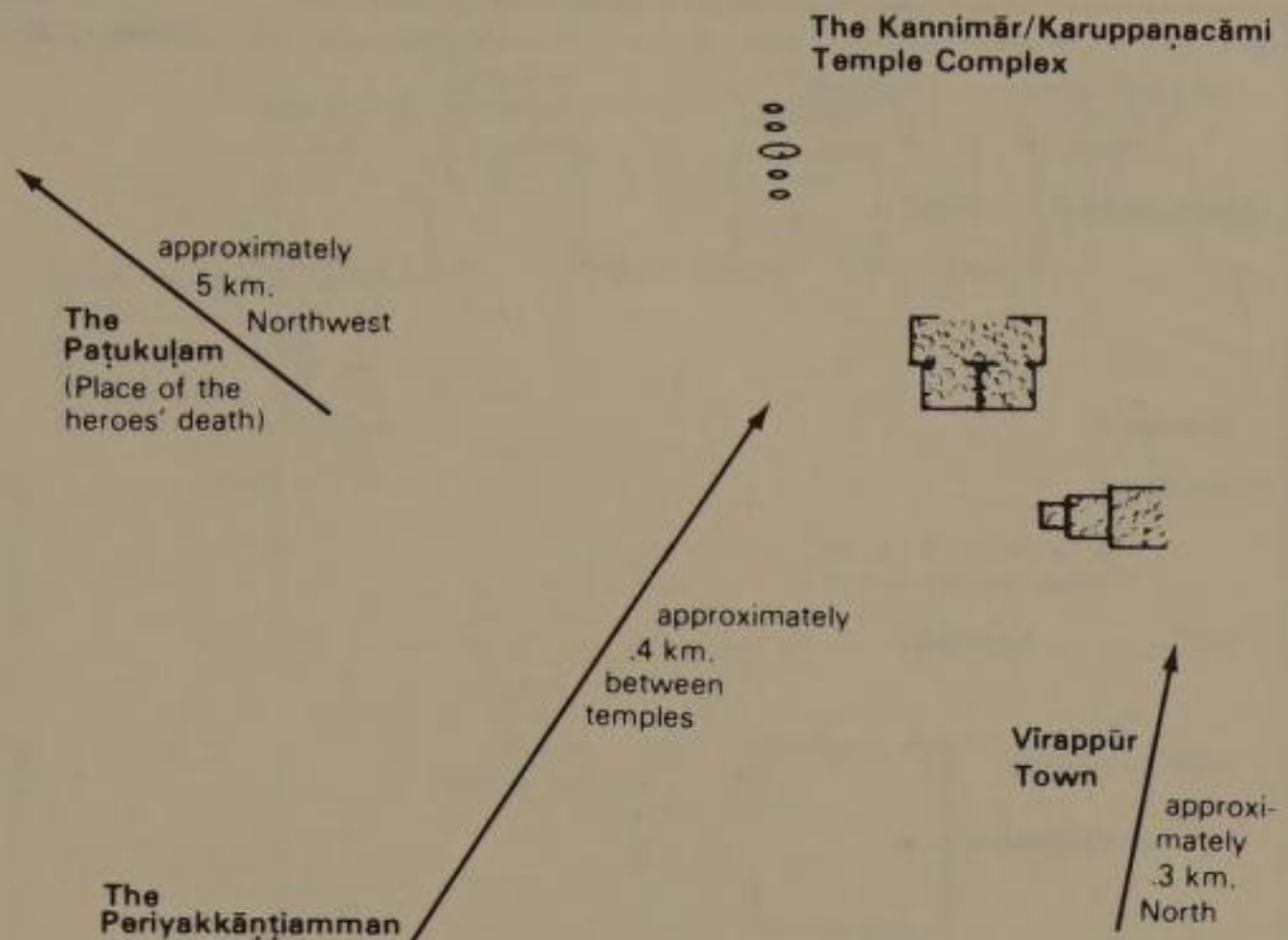
Lamp post (or base)



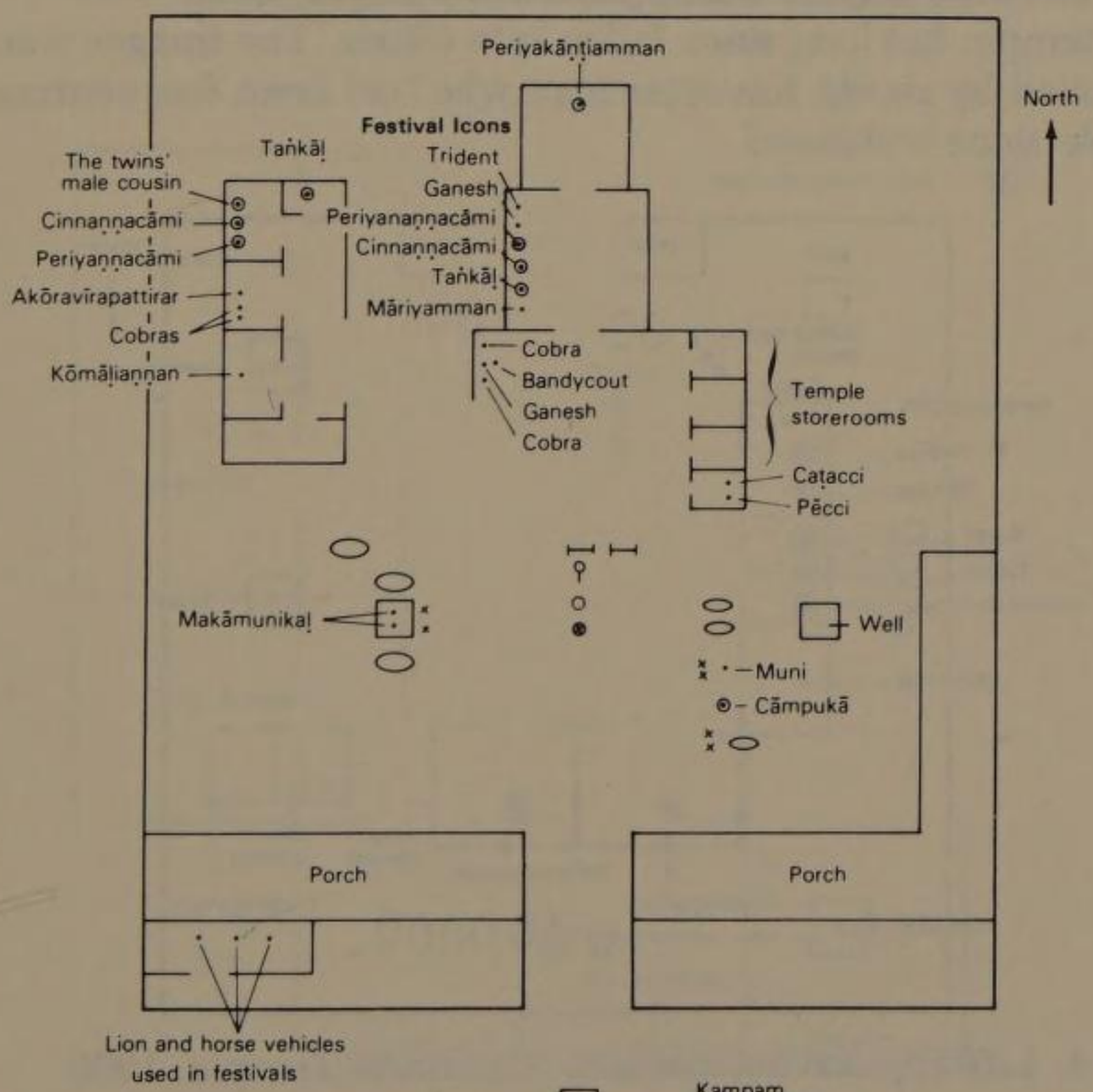
Map 1a. Vīramalai Periyakkāṇṭiamman Temple



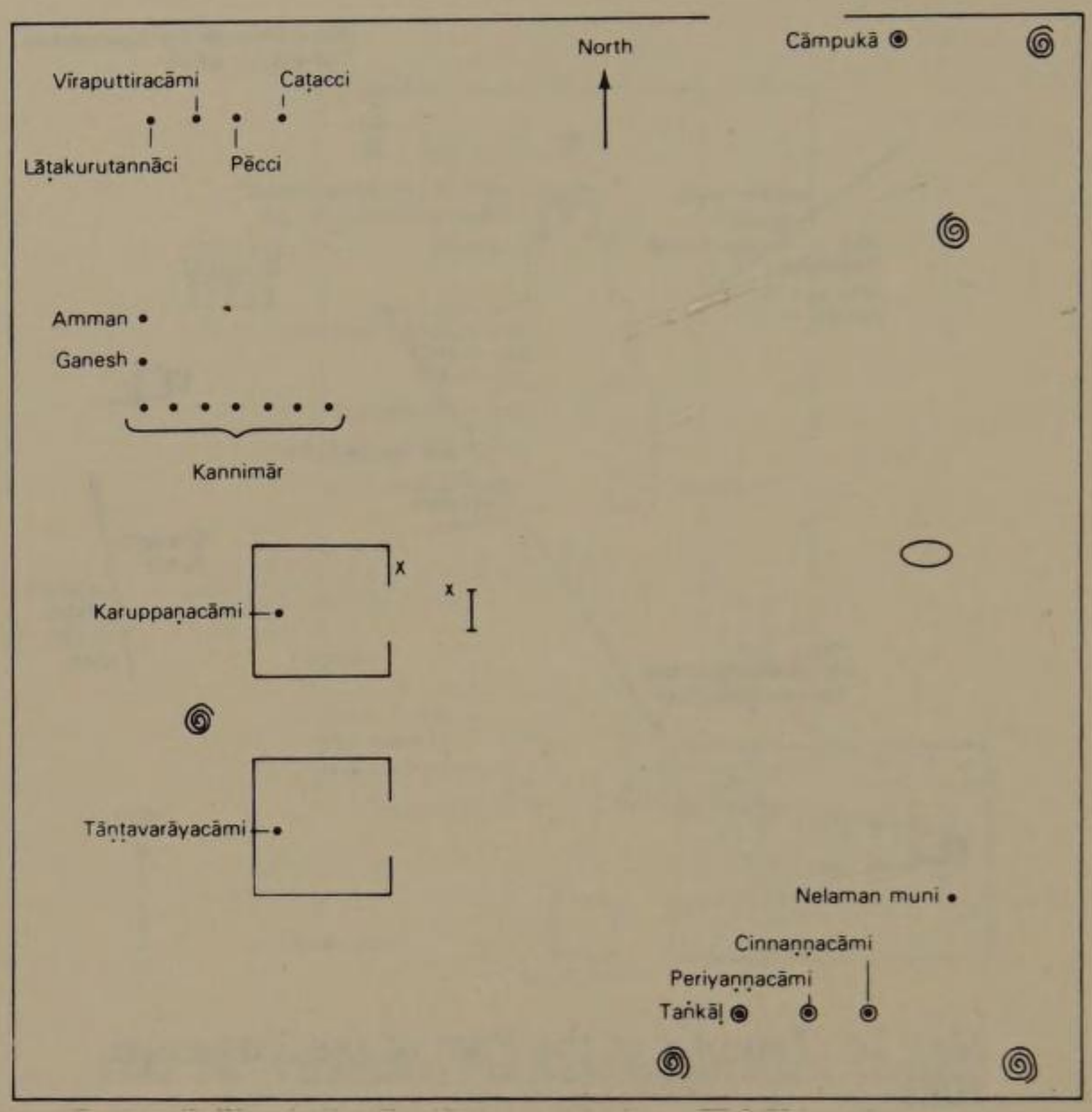
Map 1b. Vīramalai Kannimār and Karuppaṇacāmi Temple Complex



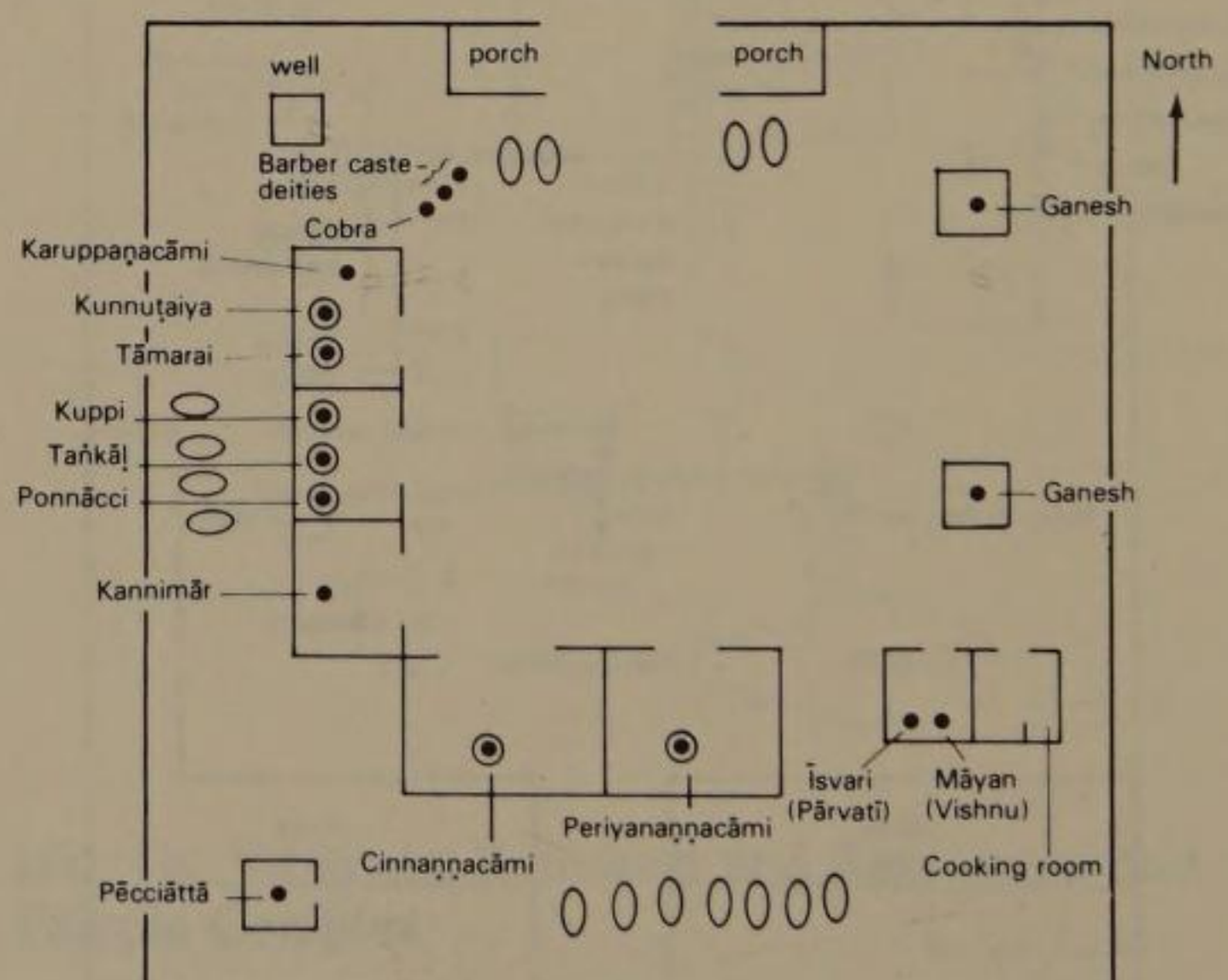
Map 1c. Temples at the Foot of the Vīramalai Hills



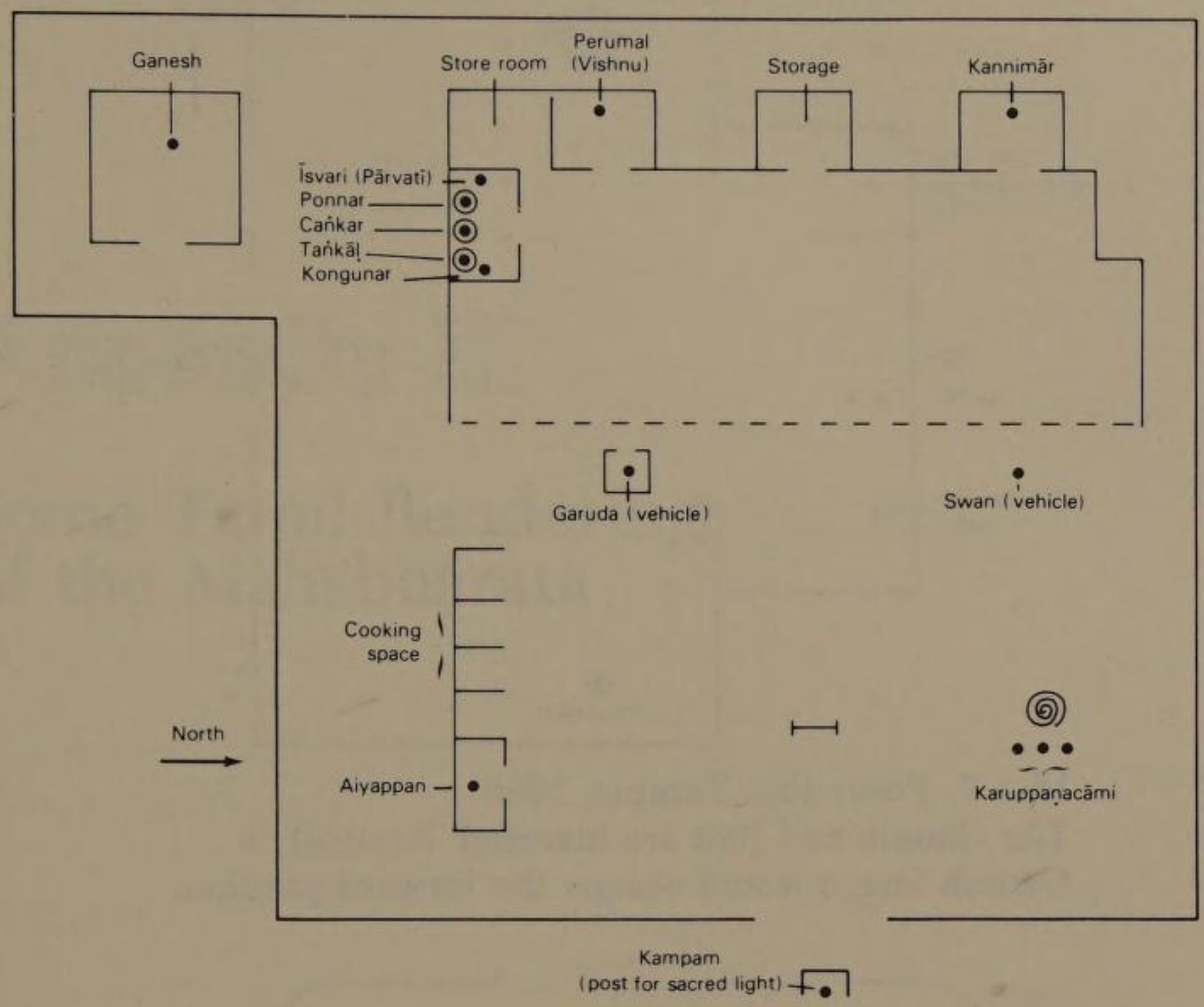
Map 2. Mōḷiyapaḷḷi Aṇṇanmār Temple, 1978



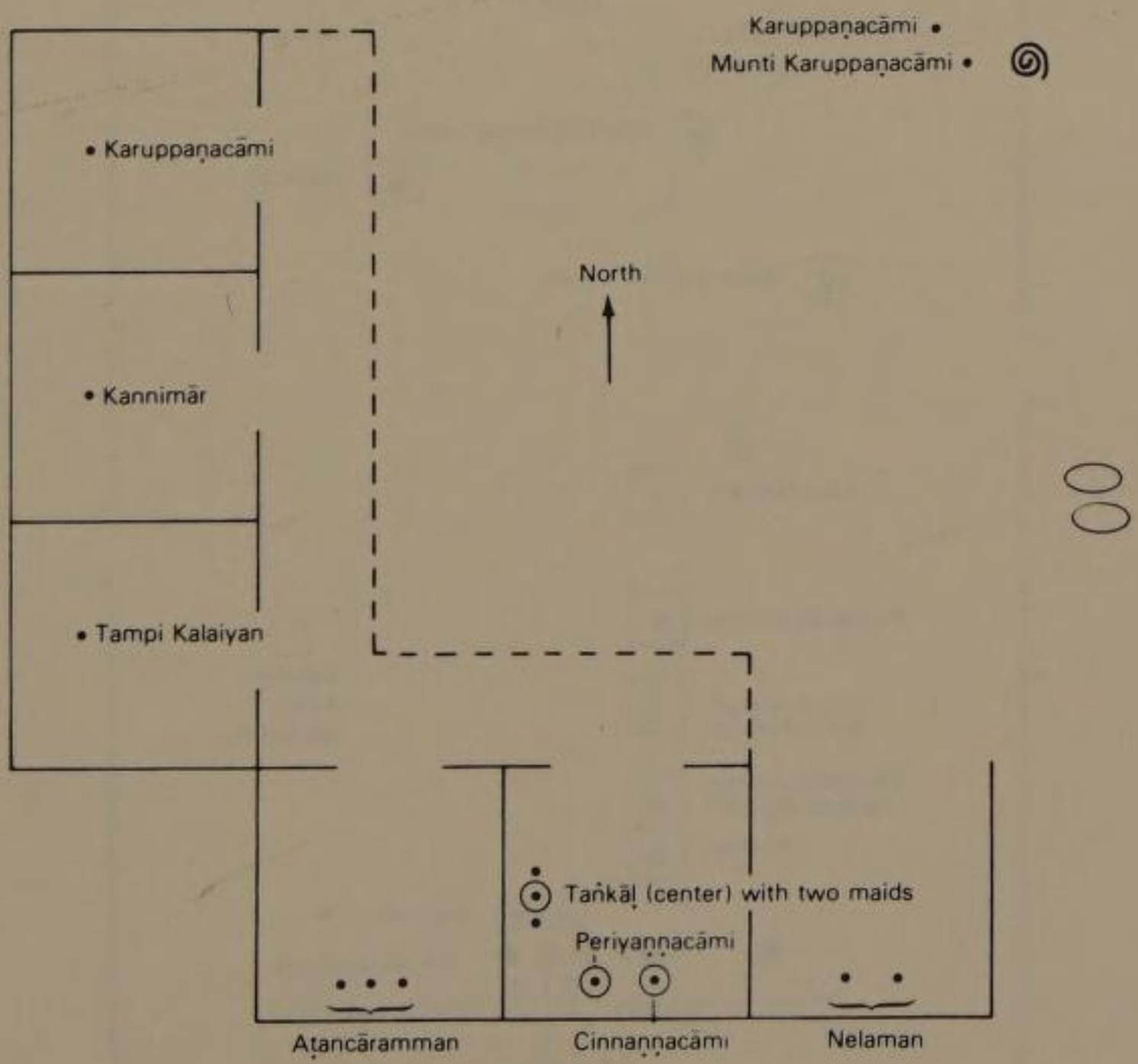
Map 3. Ōlappāḷaiyam Karuppaṇacāmi Temple, 1966
This temple has long since fallen into disuse. The images were identified by an old Kavuṇṭar man who had been frequenting the temple since childhood.



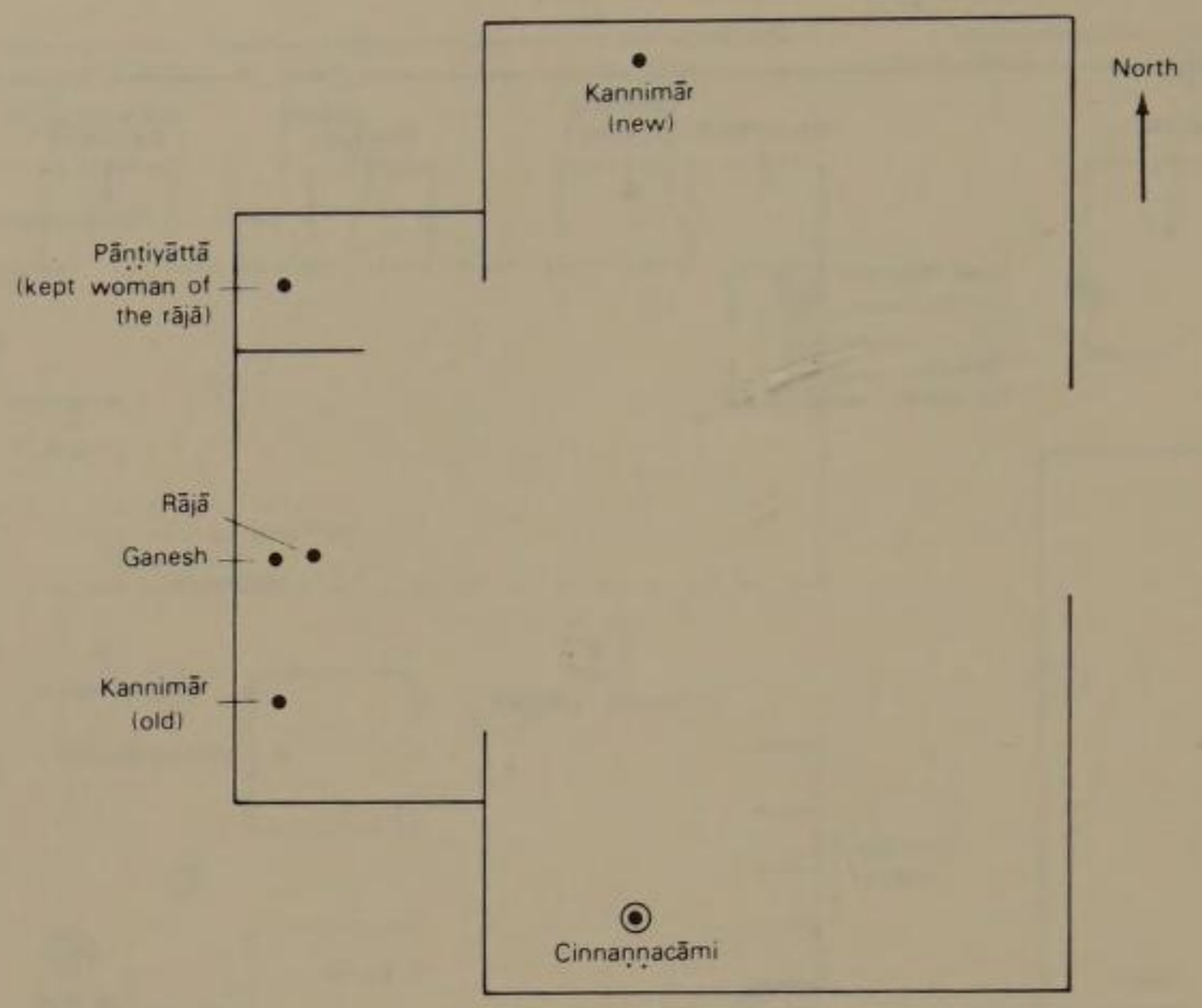
Map 4. Liṅkappakavuṇṭanvalacu Aṇṇanmār Temple, 1966
The placement of the Vishnu and Pārvatī images side by side is probably an indication of their siblingship, which is an important theme in the Brothers story.



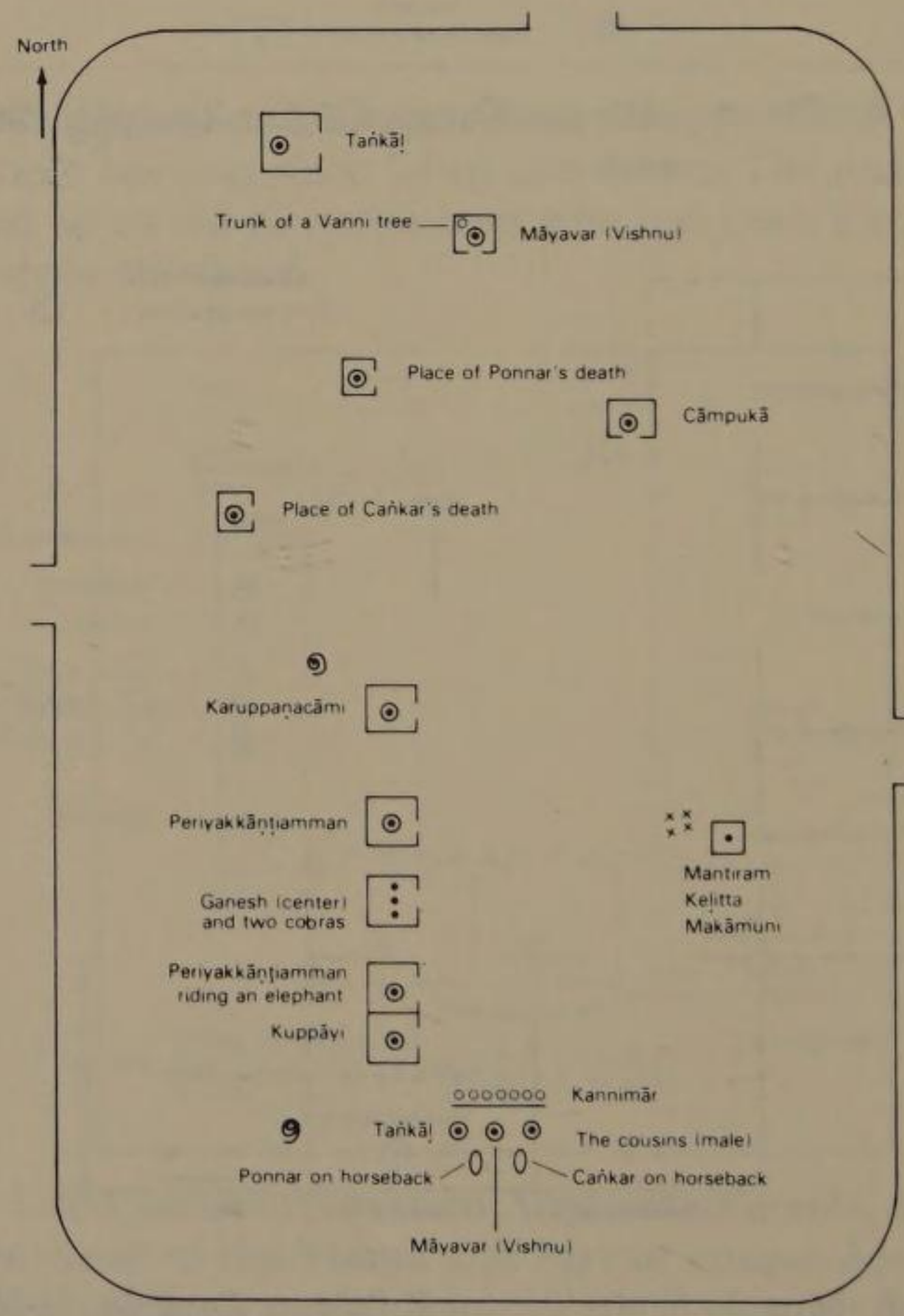
MAP 5. Tāyampāḷaiyam Kongu Cēṭṭiar Temple, 1966



MAP 6. Murukaṅkāṭu Tampi Kalaiyan Temple, 1966



MAP 7. Putūr Raja Temple, 1966
The Ganesh and Rājā are inverted. Normally a Ganesh image would occupy the forward position.



MAP 8. Paṭukaḷam, Place of the Heroes' Death

Appendix III

Some Tamil Renderings of the Mahābhārata

Approximate date of edition or of author's life	Author's name	Title
1st–3rd century	?	*Puram* 2 *Akam* 233
3rd century (?)	Peruntēvanār	*Pāratampāṭiya*
5th century (?)	Iḷaṅkō Vaṭikal	*Cilappatikāram* XXIX
9th century	Peruntēvanār	*Pāratavaṇpā*
12th–13th century	?	*Pāratam*
12th–13 century	Pukaḻēnti	*Naḷaveṇpa*
14th–15th century	Villiputtūr Āḻvār	*Pāratam*
15th–16th century	Ativirarāma	*Pāṇḍya Naiṭatam*
18th century	Nallā Piḷḷai	*Pāratam*
early 20th century	M. V. Ramanujacharya	*Pāratam*
1882–1921	S. Bharati	*Pāñcāli Capatam*
1878–1973	C. Rajagopalachari	*Vyācar Viruntu*
1961 (3rd ed. 1969)	A. L. Natarajan	*Vyasa Aruliya Mahā Pāratam* (Madras: Aruna Publications)
1971 (but undoubtedly composed earlier)	Anonymous (attributed to Pukaḻēnti Pulavar)	*Panca Pāṇḍava Vanavācam* (Madras: R. G. Pati Co.)

Comments	Lost or extant
References to the great war described in the *Mahābhārata*.	Extant
	Extant
Now known mainly from the name. At best a few verses survive.	Lost
	Extant
Probably written during the reign of an early Pāṇḍava ruler.	Extant
Probably written during the reign of Kulottuṅka III (1178–1218).	Lost
Only one episode: the winning of princess Damayanti by prince Nala.	Extant
Only 10 of the 18 parvas (sections) were completed by Villiputtūr. The work was completed in the 18th century by Aṭṭāvatānam Araṅkanāta Kavirāyar.	Extant
Only one episode: the winning of princess Damayanti by prince Nala.	Extant
The poet who completed Villiputtūr's work?	Extant
	Extant
Only one episode: Duryodhana's plot to overthrow the Pāṇḍavas.	Extant
	Extant
A popular paperback available in urban bookstores throughout Tamilnadu.	Extant
A popular paperback sold by itinerant merchants in rural areas of the Coimbatore District.	Extant

SOURCES: Zvelebil, 1974, pp. 130, 132, 142–45, 162; Hart, 1975, pp. 9, 60; and an introductory section in the 1970 reprint of the Villiputtūralavar *Villi Parātam*.

Appendix IV

Variant Names in Eight Versions of the Brothers Story

Comparison of Place Names

Version	B, D (+H)		I		L	
	Country	Town	Country	Town	Country	Town
Where the heroes' forefathers come from	Vellivaḷanāṭu				Nellivaḷanāṭu	*Vālavantippaṭṭinam* then Cittalantūr
Where the heroes' grandfather settled	Ponnivaḷanāṭu		*Tatayanāṭu*		*Vaḷanāṭu*	*Matukkarai*
Where the heroes' father settled	Ponnivaḷanāṭu	Cirukkāmpuliyūr (version H names *Alattūr*)	Nellivaḷanāṭu or Ponnivaḷanāṭu	Celvanāṭapuram and later Cirukkāmpuliyūr	Nellivaḷanāṭu or *Vaḷanāṭu*	*Vaḷanāṭu Kottai*
Nearest towns		*Āṇiyappūr* (version H names Cittālaippaṭṭinam)		Cittālaippaṭṭinam		Cittalaippaṭṭinam
Name of tank in the heroes' field		Vellaṅkulam with veṅkala mataku sluice				Vellaṅkulam with veṅkala mataku sluice
Country where the heroes' patrilineal kinsmen settled	Taṅkavaḷanāṭu		Tennuvaḷanāṭu			Pāyccalūr

The heroes' mother's native country	*Vāḷavantināṭu*					Maniyankuṟicci
Place where the heroes' mother does penance		Kāci Ponnampalam on Tannāci kompai	On the banks of the *Vaigai River*	*Mīnakshi Temple*		Ponnampalam on (in) Tannāci Kovil
Place where heroes' father sought help from a superior	*Chola nāṭu*		*Pandya nāṭu*	Cuntarapatinakar	*Chola, Pandya and Chera nāṭu areas*	*Matukkarai*, on banks of the Kāveri River
Locale of the Vēṭṭuvas		*Vīrappūr*	Mēnāṭu	*Vīrappūr*	Mēnāṭu	
Place where the heroes die and a temple is built	*Vīramalai forest*	*Vīramalai forest Vīrappūr*	*Vīramalai forest*	*Vīrappūr*	*Vīramalai forest*	*Vīrappūr*
Other (probably fictitious) places with rhyming names		Māntappūr Kūntappūr				

NOTE: Names in italic appear in Map 2, p. 30.

Names of the Main Characters

Version:	B	D	F	H	I	J	K	L
Grandfather	Kōḷattā	Kōḷattā						Kōḷattā
Grandmother	Ariyanācci	Ariyanācci						Pavaḷatta Kavuṇṭacci
Father	Kunnuṭaiyā	Kunnuṭaiyā			Mannuṭaiyan	Kunruṭaiyan	Kunnuṭaiyan	Kunnuṭaiyan
Mother	Tāmarai	Tāmarai			Tāmarai Periya-nācci	Nācci	Periyanācci	Tāmarai
Mother's brother(s)	Civa Koḷuntā Kavuṇṭar Malai Koḷuntā Kavuṇṭar							
Father's brother(s)						Cellāttan		
Twin #1	Ponnar Periyaṇṇa Periya	Ponnar Periaṇṇa Cāmi Periya	Periaṇṇa	Periaṇṇa	Ponnar	Ponnar	Ponnar	Ponnar Ponnampala Cuvāmi
Twin #2	Caṅkar Cinnaṇṇa Cinnāyya Cinna	Caṅkar Cinnaṇṇa Cāmi Cinnāyya Cinna	Chinnaṇṇa	Cinnaṇṇa	Caṅkar	Caṅkar	Caṅkar	Caṅkar
The sister	Parvati Taṅka Arukkāṇi	Parvati Taṅka Arukkāṇi			Taṅkāḷ	Arukkāni	Taṅkāḷ	Taṅkāḷ
The local goddess	Cellāttā	Cellāttā						Cellāyi
The little dog	Ponnācci	Ponnācci						
The horses	Nīlā	Nīlā			Panca Kalyāṇi			Panca Kalyāṇi
The 1st Minister	Cāmpukā	Cāmpukā			Cāmpuvan	Vīravāku	Cāmpuvan	Cāmpuvan

Notes

Throughout the Notes, citations to the *Mahābhārata* are abbreviated as follows: *Mhb.* refers to Sukthankar, 1933–59; and *Villi* refers to Kōpālakrishnamacharya, 1970.

INTRODUCTION

1. The main person listening was the scribe's mother, as she prepared vegetables and did other housework. Neighborhood children wandered in and out occasionally.

2. Child, as quoted by his editors (Sargent and Kittredge), 1904, p.255.

3. Maid Marian, whom Robin Hood courts in some late versions, is said to be unknown to the genuine Robin Hood tradition.

4. Arunachalam, 1976, mentions several figures in his comprehensive work (pp.iv, 9, 227–29). There are probably quite a few more extant in various parts of the State that have never been collected. Furthermore, Arunachalam treats only ballads that are available in a fully versified form.

5. For example, the Pābūjī story comes from a marginal area in Rajasthan, and the Brahma Nayudu story is from a similar locale in Andhra.

6. Arunachalam, 1976, p.54.

7. Ibid., p.48.

8. Ibid., pp.47–48, 54, 56.

9. Ibid., p.112.

10. Zvelebil, 1974, p.144.

1. PLACE, TIME, AND PERSONNEL

1. Goldman, I understand, also discusses the importance of this theme in an unpublished manuscript (1975?).

2. Ramanujan, 1971, and Goldman, 1978.

3. The concept is linked to divine kinship, since these epic heroes are also

local sovereigns. This theme first appears in Indian literature in the epic period, and is specifically present in the *Mahābhārata.* The same idea is given further legitimacy in the famous *Lawbook of Manu.* South Indian Chola rulers, though not alone, were particularly prone to this way of thinking about kings. Some Chola monarchs were even worshipped in the temples (Basham, 1954, pp.84–86).

4. Hiltebeitel, 1980, has also seen this pattern as important in the Gilgamesh epic.

5. Some local stories, however, fail to meet the requirements of this widespread pattern. The epic of Gugapīr, for example, seems to be heavily influenced by Muslim traditions and may represent a distinct oicotype. Others, like the Nala-Damayantī story (an excerpt from the *Mahābhārata* often told as a separate tale) are more like an extended romance. Our information is not sufficient to make generalizations about these other patterns possible. One can only point to the fact that one clear subtype, outlined above, has already been clearly established.

6. A very thoughtful discussion of the epic genre in Africa can be found in Biebuyck, 1969, 1972. He provides extensive information on the eastern Congo area. Epic traditions that exist in other regions of Africa are largely unknown to the international scholarly community.

7. A good parallel can be found in the story of Raja Lakkan and his sister, the goddess Bela, both worshipped as story heroes by members of the Kol tribe in the Mirzapur District of Uttar Pradesh. Another example is provided by the Pābūjī epic, most popular in Rajasthan.

8. Such is the case, for example, in the Kattaboman and Decinku Rajan stories, both popular in Tamilnadu.

9. In one textual version, found further to the south, the name of the heroes' caste is altered so as to describe the dominant agricultural community in that area (Kaḷḷar).

10. Arunachalam, 1976, p.177.

11. Ibid.

12. Rāmamurthi, 1977, and Irāmacāmi, 1972. The original reference can be found in the Kiraikkalai manuscript library, according to Irāmacāmi.

13. In a summary of a modern radio play (Kaṇṇanār, 1968) the younger twin is killed by Talaiyūr Kālī. In this version some of the more-fanciful interpretations added by later generations of poets have been trimmed away from the core legend. Perhaps there is a general tendency in Indian heroic stories to convert actual battlefield deaths to self-willed martyrdom. A similar pattern of embroidery is manifest in late versions of the Kattabomman story. In the earliest account available, Omaidurai simply escapes from the enemy. In a later version he commits suicide (a more heroic act) to evade capture by the British (Vānamāmalai, 1969, pp.86, 89).

14. Murton, 1979, p.14.

15. Historically, the term *valanāṭu* was used to designate a large political unit that encompassed several smaller *nāṭu* areas. Thus, the word *valanāṭu* has a technical meaning—a particular type of political unit. In the Brothers story, however, it may also be the name of a specific place.

16. Perhaps the unusual place name, Valanāṭu, bears testimony to the fact that it was once a central defense point for a large political area.

17. Subrahmanya Aiyer, 1953–54, and the Archeological Survey of India, *Epigraphia Indica,* vol.25, p.95.

18. Some locational evidence is also embedded in the *nāṭu* names that various versions of the story use. Valavantināṭu, which is mentioned in several accounts, is the name of an area lying just north of the Vīramalai, on the opposite side of the Kāveri River from Matukkarai. One version names this *nāṭu* as the place where the heroes' mother grew up. Another refers to it as the locale where the heroes' male ancestors lived. As the twins married their own maternal cross-cousins, it is quite possible that these two male descent groups may have held ancestral claims in overlapping areas. Tradition also holds that many Vēḷāḷars moved south from the Dharmapuri and Kolar regions some time after 1300 in response to Islamic invasions there. General chaos afflicted the outlying areas of the Vijayanagar empire at this time and could have led to the events the story describes. Perhaps the heroes' ancestors were indeed once linked to this northern Vēḷāḷar line, as several recent authors have claimed (Caktikkanal, 1977, introductory essays).

19. Thurston, 1909, vol. VII, pp.362–63, gives a good summary of the relevant myth. It is widely known in folk tradition.

20. A number of details about the story can be found in Kamaliah, 1975, pp.29–49.

2. RITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE STORY

1. Lord, 1965, pp.66–67, 220.

2. Beck, 1972a, pp.240–43, 256; 1974, pp.3–4, 7–9. Claus also discusses the importance of the elder brother/younger sister bond in the neighboring region of Tulunad (1978, pp.32, 37).

3. Egnor, 1977, gives several autobiographical accounts that illustrate this principle.

4. These local goddess ceremonies have been discussed at length in Beck, 1981.

5. Vishnu, as explained elsewhere, is Pārvatī's (Periyakkāṇṭi's) brother according to wider South Indian mythological tradition. In this role it is appropriate that even he, a great god, volunteer to serve the goddess.

6. Hart, 1975a, p.139.

7. Ibid., p.136.

8. Hiltebeitel, 1980, pp.222–23.

9. A very similar festival, which also involves links between an epic hero, an untouchable, and a goddess, as well as a reenactment of a death scene on a battlefield, has been reported recently from Andhra Pradesh by Narayana Rao, 1980, p.8.

3. ORAL PERFORMANCES

1. Basgöz, 1978.

2. Oinas, 1978, p.370.

3. Olrik, p.138.

4. A count taken from the dictated text yielded one formula per 40 lines of prose. The ratio of such formulas to ordinary prose is perhaps slightly higher in the performed variant.

5. Ganesh and Saraswatī are worshipped all over India, while Murugan is important mainly in the Tamil-speaking areas of the South.

6. J. C. Miller, p.118.

7. John Smith, 1980.

8. This conclusion matches well with Kenneth Brown's statement that "from the beginning to the end of a narrative, explanation and interpretation are taking place; and memory and imagination seem at times indistinguishable" (Brown and Roberts, 1980, p.126). Jan Vansina captured the same idea when he wrote, "The mind plays with the mnemonic code to evoke rather than to remember and uses its potential for association to explore new connections" (ibid., p.14).

9. Fowler, 1966, p.99.

10. Vēṅkai, vēmpu, palā, and māvilińka are the common woods employed for this purpose.

11. Uṭaiyār, Nāṭār, Vannār, and Kuravar clan temples are the most common. Members of all these groups play the drum. Nāyakkans and Paṇṭārams are also sometimes hand-drum players.

12. Lord, 1960, pp.39–41. In the Indian case local bards sometimes use four tones. This seems to be the case for rhythm #4.

13. Credit for the analysis of these excerpts and of all the ensuing material on melody and rhythm is due Wendy Stuart, an ethnomusicologist who resides in Vancouver. The selection of the particular excerpts on which she worked, however, is my responsibility, as Mrs. Stuart is not a specialist in this local musical culture. The responsibility for the write-up and broader interpretation of the material is also mine.

14. Stuart Blackburn discusses a similar pick-up beat in a forthcoming paper on performance markers in Tamil bardic tradition. He finds this feature associated with moments of great emotional depth in a story, specifically at the point where the heroes die and members of the audience become possessed. His data are from Tirunelvelli. This association also holds in a general way for the uṭukkai drummers I studied. Here, however, pick-up beats have a more-varied usage and appear at exciting points throughout the story, rather than just at moments of heroic death.

15. In order not to bias this calculation, gaps between the last song of any given night's performance and the first song of the next one were not included. The tape speed used was 1 7/8.

16. This passage is a reference to a classical myth (not included in the Brothers story) in which Vishnu rescues Śiva from a demon by taking the form of a beautiful woman. He then gets the demon to imitate (her) movements. One of these is to place his hand over his own head, by which gesture the demon annihilates itself in accordance with a boon that anything its hands were placed on would burn to ashes.

17. See Beck, 1972, p.34, for details.

18. Ganesh (also called Vināyakkar) must be worshipped at the beginning of any auspicious event. He is especially associated with overcoming "obstacles" that might block the success of an undertaking. Saraswatī is the goddess of learning and is very generally associated with the work of bards. Murugan (often called Skanda) is one of the most-popular divinities of the South.

19. These details are taken from a letter written by K. Cuntaram, soon after the events occurred.

4. PRINTED TEXTS

1. Arunachalam, 1976, pp.47, 49.
2. The work currently sells for Rs. 1.75, which is about 22 cents in United States funds.
3. Arunachalam, 1976, p.75. The five main presses for these materials are R. G. Pati Co., Sri Makal Co., B. Irattina Nāyakar Sons, and Pārttacārati Nāyutu Sons, all in Madras; and P. N. C. Brothers, in Madurai.
4. Rāmamurthi, 1977, pp.43–51.
5. Ibid., pp.42, 45.
6. This excerpt appears on pp.28–29 of Version I and p.119 of Version L.
7. This description bears a striking resemblance to rituals traditionally ascribed to highway robbers in India (the thugees; see, for example, Bruce, 1968, and Tuker, 1961), which are usually linked to the goddess Kāḷī (Tamil, Kāḷi). The fact that the Vēṭṭuva leader was named Kālī in Version L could be significant in this regard. The term *kaḷi* refers to a kind of gruel made with salt, flour, and water.
8. Two other farming communities, located farther south, that are considered rivals of the Vēḷāḷar Kavuṇṭars.
9. A reference to the fact that the thin coating of gold with which the goldsmith had covered the wooden vessel had melted off during the night when it was set too close to a candle.

5. STORY STRUCTURE

1. *Mhb.,* 1.118.14; 2.80.51.
2. Ibid., 3.149.34–36.
3. Ibid., 3.36.1–34; *Villi,* 5.4.15–20.
4. *Mhb.,* 1.11.15–16; *Villi,* 1.5.55.
5. The sun begets twins on the daughter of Vishvakarman while she hides (in the form of a mare) to escape his heat. The local rulers in the Brothers story are similarly blessed with twin sons. Though a mare does not serve as these men's mother, two magical horses contribute an important element to this account. The heroic twins are skilled and devoted riders. Hence various resonances of the basic myth are spread through the story.
6. Some people argue that the Kshatriya varna never existed in South India. It is clear, however, that the warrior life-style has been important ideologically in the South since the time of Tamilnadu's most-ancient literature. That is particularly true of the dry interior areas, where for many centuries political hegemony has depended mainly on fighting skills.
7. Dumézil, 1968, pp.53–102.
8. The conch is also a symbol carried into battle by Vishnu. It is said to contain the several worlds and to emit them when blown.
9. The *Nātyśāstra* (Ghosh translation, p.23), links the four varnas to white, red, yellow, and blue (black) respectively. Interestingly, too, the name Arjuna means "white." The earlier *Chandogya Upanishad* suggests a rank order for colors that begins with red (Hume translation, 3.6–3.9, pp.204–206).
10. The heroes' sister is a reincarnation of a set of goddesses called the Kannimār. Poems about them depict their warlike qualities (Srinivas, 1943,

pp.61–70). The same theme of the virgin female warrior can also be found in a popular Tamil addition to the *Mahābhārata* called the *Alliarasanimālai,* as well as in the stories about Māriyamman and other local goddesses. See Shulman, 1976, and 1978a.

11. Ward, 1968. Dumézil also discusses the importance of twins, 1968, pp. 73–89. Olrik, 1965, p.136, states in his epic laws that whenever twins are elevated to major roles, they are given contrasting personalities. A number of anthropologists have noted the importance of twins in cultures outside the Indo-European area as well. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown first encouraged a modern spate of ethnographic attention to this question. He discussed the theoretical significance of twins as a simultaneous symbol of unity and of duality.

12. Elwin, 1954, pp.480–91. Opposite-sex twins are frequently described as the first beings. Their sexual union then produces the human race (Elwin, 1954, pp.185–86, 427–29, 526–27). Twins also have a role in the creation of animals and of mountains.

13. Prabhupāda (trans.), *Srimad Bhāgavatam,* 1974, Canto 3, Part 2, 14. 8–16; Part 3, 17.2. In general, demonic births in Hindu mythology tend to be multiple ones.

14. Lapoint, 1977, pp.16, 29.

15. Three and five are very sacred numbers. Both appear frequently in Hindu rituals.

16. In the case of the twins, their superior habits are made clear from the fact that their parents refuse to accept cooked food from Vēṭṭuvas, even under hardship conditions. The Rākshasas are called blood-drinkers and are carnivorous or even cannibalistic.

17. The Vēṭṭuvas control an army of 5,000 tigers and 5,000 cobras. They also have magical pet birds and a special relationship with a great black boar. Cobras and birds seem to be in alliance with the Rākshasas. They attack Arjuna and Krishna in the *Mahābhārata* when the latter enter the forest.

18. A similar battle between a set of heroes and forest hunters is also important in the *Peruṅkatai,* a Jain work ascribed to Koṅkuvēḷir, the "chieftain of the Kongu country," composed in the ninth century. Much early Tamil poetry, furthermore, revolves around the military hero. A parallel probably exists here with works of Tamil "classical" literature, as well as with pan-Indian epic materials. Hero stones were commonly erected in memory of particular warriors and apparently were used as the foci of local cults. Many stones were carved with a representation of the hero and contained inscriptions about his valiant deeds. A good collection is on permanent display in the Madras museum. Smith (n.d.) mentions that similar hero stones are associated with the worship of the folk hero Pābūjī in a local epic from Rajasthan.

19. *Mhb.,* 1.215.1–19; 1.219.11–21; *Villi,* 1.8.24–25, 47–52; 1.8.67–72.

20. De Vries, 1963, pp.211–18. Although many alternatives that do not bear on the Brothers story have been omitted, the table remains faithful to the essentials of each prediction.

21. The tiger has important associations with the goddess, both in Indian folklore and in Hindu mythology. The tiger is presumed to have a heavenly origin and is the key animal to participate in the goddess's slaying of the buffalo demon. Tiger milk and ground tiger bones are the ultimate medicine, yielding both health and strength, according to folk tradition (Crooke, 1968, vol.II, pp.214–18; Hiltebeitel, 1978, p.787).

22. They get around this symbolic rite by wearing silver finger extensions, specially made for the occasion.

23. A famous shrine honors this trio in Orissa. There is a legend there of an incestuous relationship between Krishna (in his form as Jaganātha) and Subhadrā. Perhaps it reflects a sister/wife merger similar to that implied by Draupadī's transformation into the heroes' sister. Added to this set of overtones is the fact that Subhadrā later married Arjuna, the male hero from whom one of the twins is said to be reincarnated.

Further speculation of this kind is provided by R. S. D. Sen, who finds Sītā as the sister (not wife) of Rāma and Laksmaṇa in an early Buddhist story called *Daśaratha Jātaka.* Later versions of the same basic tale portray Sītā as Rāma's spouse. Hence, Sen sees the same merger of roles as possibly present in various developmental stages of the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

24. An incestuous relationship with a sister is also implied here. Nārāyana is said to have placed a flower on his thigh from which arose a nymph of great charm. Nara and Nārāyana were filled with shame and vexation upon seeing her, as they were supposed to be in a deep ascetic trance at the time. In the Brothers story, however, no hints of sexual attraction between the heroes and their sister are allowed to surface.

25. Shulman, 1978b, p.57. believes that Krishna and Māyavar were very closely linked in early Tamil literature. In the Brothers story Māyavar sometimes takes the role of a shepherd and carries a little box said to belong to shepherds. Zvelebil speaks of a similar set of associations (1975, p.35; 1977, p.239).

26. These seven virgin goddesses seem to be specific to South India, though their vague links to the seven "mothers" in the North Indian pantheon are suggestive. The Kannimār are generally associated with male lineages, at least in the Coimbatore District, and are said to bring prosperity to a group of agnatically related males. Often young girls who die before marriage are explicitly assimilated to "Kannimār" shrines in local lineage temples.

27. Whether this term of address, and the name of the goddess (Parvati versus Pārvatī) are one and the same, is unclear.

28. A reference to the goddess Pārvatī.

29. Biardeau and Malamoud, p.99; O'Flaherty, 1976, p.85. Many South Indian myths link Śiva with lower-ranking males (such as Sudalai Madan or Talavay Madan) who are considered to be creations or extensions of himself and have been consigned to roam the earth (Reiniche, 1979, pp.32, 132, 203). These divine forms are certainly "outcastes" by virtue of their unorthodox social and dietary behavior, even if they are not explicitly identified as such by caste labels.

30. *Mhb.,* 14.54.12–35 (as cited in O'Flaherty, p.173, but not a reference to the Poona edition).

31. Hiltebeitel, 1980, pp.222–23.

32. Ibid.

33. *Mhb.,* 10.7.1–66; 1.61.66–67.

34. Ibid., 10.15.28–31; 10.16.21.

35. There is one case of revival, where the death is more of a magical (21-year) sleep, in which Vishnu does seem to have the power to restore life without Śiva's aid.

36. These objects seem to have some special independent magical power. The implication is that Vishnu can use them to manipulate Śiva, and that the

power contained in them is somehow roughly equal to that which the twin heroes will control while on earth. The conch produces a sacred sound when blown and apparently has the power to attract the attention of the gods. The little box is an item carried by Brahmans. It contains a sacred mixture of sandalwood and saffron powders, and its contents are used for making a standard set of markings on the forehead that indicate one's sectarian affiliation. A similar box is used by Śiva to trap the spirits of the *Mahābhārata* heroes before he inserts them into Tāmarai's belly.

37. Arunachalam, 1976, p.16.
38. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, pp.85, 101.
39. Biardeau, 1981, p.8.
40. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, pp.174, 354–56.

6. ACTIONS AND EVENTS

1. A name for the local family goddess. Usually she is called Cellāttā, though she is thought to be a form of Śiva's wife, Pārvatī.

2. Marriott (1976) first introduced this term in a very useful, general discussion of the concept of individuality in India. The specific image of a metaphorically bisexual king draws on very old tradition in this area. Similar conventional praise lines for a monarch can be found in eleventh- and twelfth-century inscriptions located in the region (Subramanya Aiyer, 1953–54).

3. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, p.101 (who cites Biardeau, 1971–72, pp.140–41, and Heesterman, 1957, p.153).

4. When not active in the Brothers' affairs, Vishnu reclines on a serpent that itself rests on a sea of milk. But when he is called upon by the heroes they use the name Māyavar, a form of Vishnu that seems linked to the playful Krishna. For more details on this connection see Zvelebil, 1977.

5. The ritually correct partner *(urimai pen)* for a Kavuṇṭar man in the Kongu area is his matrilateral cross-cousin. For details see Beck, 1972, pp.239–40.

6. Roghair, 1980. Claus (1978, p.29) has published a similar description based on work in Tulunad.

7. Ward, 1968; Dumézil, 1968; Chadwick and Zhirmunsky, 1969. The same theme is present in the North Indian epics about Pābūjī and Gugga. In Gugga's case, his horse was born at the same instant that he was. That also seems to be the case for the local heroes and their horses, at least, the necessary impregnations occurred as a result of the same set of events. For the role of the horse in one particular Indian myth see O'Flaherty, 1971.

8. Gell, 1980, pp.221, 247.

9. Subhadra is Arjuna's matrilateral cross-cousin (*Mhb.*, 1.104.1–3; 1.211. 18–19; *Villi*, 1.7.56). And the law-giver Manu is also cited in this matter (*Mhb.*, 13.44.17). There is a broader debate in the literature about whether cross-cousin marriage is an important feature of the *Mahābhārata*. However, the structure of the larger story does not depend as heavily on this feature as does the Brothers epic.

10. In Tuluva folklore there is also a boar allied with a forest king that attacks neighboring cleared areas. Hunting these animals is part of the ruler's responsibility and is linked to the defense of the kingdom. For details see Claus, 1977. Chadwick and Chadwick stressed the importance of threats to women in the structure of epic literature (1932, vol.I, pp.90ff.).

11. Seven is, of course, a sacred number. The reason for seven is that Tāmarai's father-in-law once killed seven cows. His daughter-in-law must now pay for these lives before she can bear issue for his son. Elsewhere in the story there are seven hell pits and seven young goddesses (the Kannimār). On two occasions Vishnu uses a sequence of seven trials when testing the heroine. Olrik calls this the "law of repetition" (1965, p.133), though he seems to think the number four is particularly popular in Indian stories.

12. The same idea is present when the great boar has been killed and his meat is distributed. By a clever trick, Vishnu obtains its head. This sign is recognized by the Brothers as an omen of their own impending death.

13. She instead foresees their doom and asks them not to go. They, of course, ignore her pleas.

14. Indeed, the Tamil folk expression *pen jati* suggests that women are a caste or species apart. Certainly the difference between males and females in the local epic overshadows the difference between "human" and "animal" as distinct categories.

15. *Mhb.,* 3.39.20–24; *Villi,* 3.138.

16. References to these valued female dirges appear very early in Tamil literature. Both Appar and Campantar, two famous poets of the early seventh century, mention this custom in works included in the *Tevaram,* a famous Tamil anthology of bakti poems.

7. MORAL PRINCIPLES

1. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, p.33.

2. Ibid., pp.38–39.

3. The younger twin's uncertainty, even faint-heartedness at this point, could be compared to Arjuna's doubts about going into battle, so eloquently discussed in the famous Bhagavad Gita section of the *Mahābhārata.* However, the hero of the local epic simply seems frightened. He does not place his reluctance in a philosophical framework. One might argue that this passage provides a subtle commentary on the Brahmanical concepts about *dharma* (moral duty) that pervade the *Mahābhārata* equivalent. Was Arjuna just rationalizing his sense of terror by expressing hesitation in such eloquent terms?

4. There are similar ideas expressed in the *Mahābhārata,* for example, at 1.127.1–17 or 13.6.7. In the latter, Bhīṣma, speaking to his brother's grandson Yudhisthira, says, "It is not only destiny but also personal effort that determine human life."

5. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, p.360; Smith, 1977a, p.31.

6. At least one other Tamil folk story shows men gambling with the gods (Sastri, 1886, p.168).

7. Biardeau, as quoted in Hiltebeitel, 1976a, p.312.

8. Some analysts have argued that these final scenes are a late addition,

and that the *Mahābhārata* originally ended with the great war itself. If so, the earlier form of that epic would have been closer to the local one.

9. Smith makes a similar point, but stresses even more that this breech should be an initial fault, occurring at the very beginning of the story. In his view, that initial error is the cause of an inexorable chain of events that follow (1980, p.69).

10. *Mhb.,* 3.40.1–61. Wild boars seem to be important figures in a number of folk traditions, at least in the southern part of South Asia. A similar beast is an important forest deity in *Mayndala,* a story Peter Claus (1979) collected in the Tulunad area of Karnataka. Ron Walcott of the American Folklife Center at the United States Library of Congress also reports the prominence of a boar in a Singhalese epic from Sri Lanka (personal communication).

11. The overtones of Vishnu's receiving the head of the sacrifice reach well beyond the limits discussed here. There are references to it in the *Brāhmanas,* where he gets a similar share of the offerings.

12. Hiltebeitel, 1976a, p.318.

13. Falk, 1973. See also Heesterman, 1957, and Claus, 1977, for other examples relating to the same idea.

14. Thomas, 1975.

15. Van Buitenen, 1975, vol.II, p.1976.

16. Yudhisthira tells Droṇa that his ally Aśvathāmma has been killed (and then in a whisper qualifies that by saying it is an elephant by the same name that is dead (*Mhb.,* 2.164.101–12).

17. *Mhb.,* 1.123.24–39; *Villi,* 1.3.50.

18. *Mhb.,* 2.60.47; 2.61.1–6; *Villi,* 5.4.12–13, 15–16. (The "cause" here is his anger over Yudhisthira's agreeing to set their wife, Draupadī, as the prize in a dice game against scheming opponents.)

19. This feature is common to peasant myths in many societies (Wolf, 1966, pp.106–107).

20. Drekmeier, 1962, p.135.

21. Caktikkanal, 1972.

22. Other popular spellings are *Silappadikaram* and *Shilappadikaram.*

8. METAPHORS AND GENERAL COMPARISONS

1. For a parallel discussion see Jackson, 1978.

2. Pandit Kedarnath Thakur, *The Ornament of Bastar* (Bastar-Bhuṣaṇ) (Kashi, 1908). The quotation is taken from a typescript summary with no page indicated.

3. The famous art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy also argued that folk/classical contrasts in India can best be accounted for by variations in economic status, taken in the broadest sense (1936, pp.1–12). As for magical female characters who ultimately direct the course of story events, Smith (n.d.) discusses a parallel case for a Cāran woman called Deval, in the Pābūjī epic from Rajasthan. She is also discussed briefly in Smith, 1980, p.72.

4. *Mhb.,* 1.142; 1.150–52.

5. Ibid., 5.72.3–4; *Villi,* 3.14.16; 4.13.20.

6. *Mhb.,* 4.66.3–5.

7. Ibid., 8.3.14; *Villi,* Sabha parva, 257.

8. *Mhb.,* 1.123.40; *Villi,* 3.17.58.
9. *Mhb.,* 6.21.1; 6.23.25–47; 6.116.15–28.
10. Ibid., 4.66.9–10.
11. Ibid., 1.114.24–35.
12. Ibid., 1.114.27–63; 1.123.42–43.
13. Ibid., 1.123.1; *Villi,* 1.3.49.
14. *Mhb.,* 2.68.30–33.
15. Arjuna is not a Brahman in the *Mahābhārata,* but he is clearly influenced by Brahman ideals.
16. *Mhb.,* 1.123.1; *Villi,* 1.3.49.
17. The same pattern holds true in another South Indian epic for which written and oral variants have been compared (see Beck, 1972b).
18. In order to avoid bias in sampling procedures, the selection of lines was made by an assistant who had no idea, at the time, what comparative questions would be asked.
19. Bowra, 1930, p.114.
20. Hopkins, 1969, Appendix A, pp.403–45. A translation of the first 200 entries of this material was kindly provided by Mrs. Mandakranta Bose.
21. Lord, 1960.
22. Ibid., 1965 edition, p.54.

CONCLUSION

1. The *Mahābhārata* may once have played a similarly assertive, even antagonistic role as a popular legend of family rivalries, meant to contrast with the sacred texts of an older, and highly ritualistic Indo-Aryan milieu. Priests and law-givers of that time had their own literature against which this present-day classic may first have developed as a protest. Later acretions and shifts in perspective now overshadow what appear originally to have been extensive differences between such priest and warrior points of view. For a fuller discussion of these shifts see Smith, 1980, especially pp.49–50.

APPENDIX I

1. Basham, 154, p.207.
2. Brown, 1968, p.50.
3. Mary Smith, as quoted in J. Smith, 1980.
4. For example, in Halbi folklore (Madhya Pradesh). Francis Woods, Summer Institute of Linguistics (personal communication).
5. Kane, 1975, for example, cites Manu, 9.22–228, as making this point very forcefully (vol.1, pp.147, 180, 202). Brown, 1968, p.47, citing Richard C. Temple, says that the related game of chaupur is commonly mentioned in Punjabi folk legends.
6. Falkener, 1961, pp.257–58.
7. Basham, 1954, p.207.
8. Lannoy, 1971, p.298; and Brown, 1968, p.51.
9. *Ānanta Vikaṭan,* 1977 issues.
10. Beck, 1976.
11. Villiputtūr Ālvar, 1970, commentary on the text, vol.2, p.312.

12. Culin, 1898, pp.851–54.
13. Falkener, 1961, p.261; and Brown, 1954, p.46.
14. Srikantaiya, n.d., pp.1–8; my interpretation of the data he provided.
15. Culin, 1898, pp.851–54.
16. Falkener, 1961, p.260. Brown, 1968, pp.47–48, citing Richard C. Temple, differs in detail by saying that red must play with yellow, and green with black.
17. G. J. Held, as cited in Lannoy, 1971, p.299.
18. Falkener, 1961, p.259.
19. Lannoy, 1971, p.299.
20. Bell, 1960, pp.17, 51.
21. Basham, 1954, p.207.
22. The *Bhavishya Purana,* as cited by Falkener, 1961, pp.124–29. Bell suggests A.D. 500 as the date of this development (1960, p.51).
23. Further discussion of the role of dicing in Indian classical literature can be found in Held, 1935, pp.193, 258, 274–78; Hiltebeitel, 1976a, pp.86–101; and Heesterman, 1957, p.153.

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